# THE Public Interest

NUMBER 144, SUMMER 2001, PRICE: $6.50

## Education Dilemmas, Old and New

**The Surprising Consensus on School Choice**
*Jay P. Greene*

**Revamping Special Education**
*Wade F. Horn & Douglas Tynan*

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**The Problem of Reading in an Age of Mass Democracy**
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**American Diversity and the 2000 Census** — *Nathan Glazer*

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BOOKS IN REVIEW:
*William A. Galston* on liberal quarrels
*Jerry Z. Muller* on Harvey Mansfield
*Peter Berkowitz* on virtue and poverty
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THE PUBLIC INTEREST (ISSN# 0033-3557) is published quarterly by National Affairs, Inc., and appears in Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall issues. Its office of publication is located at 1112 16th Street, N.W., Suite 530, Washington, D.C., 20036. Telephone: (202) 785-8555. If you have problems with your subscription, please call (888) 267-6030. Subscription price: $25 for one year, $42.50 for two years, $60 for three years. Add $3 annually for Canadian and foreign subscriptions (via surface mail). To receive back issues, please send a check for $7.50 per issue to the office of publication. Periodicals postage is paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing offices. ©2001 by National Affairs, Inc. Postmaster: Please send all changes of address to *The Public Interest* Subscription Office, Dept. PI, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, N.J., 07834. Articles appearing in this journal are abstracted and indexed in *Reader's Guide, P.A.I.S., Historical Abstracts, ABC Pol Sci, Social Science Index, Sociological Abstracts, Academic Abstracts, Social Science Source,* and *America: History and Life,* and are available on microfilm from University Microfilms International. *The Public Interest* is printed by Cadmus Journal Services.

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P.O. Box 3000,Denville, NJ 07834
(888) 267-6030

**Newsstand Distributors**
Bernhard DeBoer, Inc.
113 Centre Street
Nutley, NJ 07110

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# American diversity and the 2000 Census

NATHAN GLAZER

THE 2000 census, on which the Census Bureau started issuing reports in March and April of 2001, reflected, in its structure and its results, the two enduring themes of American racial and ethnic diversity, present since the origins of American society in the English colonies of the Atlantic coast: first, the continued presence of what appears to be an almost permanent lower caste composed of the black race; and second, the ongoing process of immigration of races and peoples from all quarters of the globe, who seem, within a few generations, to merge into a common American people.

To make two such large generalizations is admittedly a bold move. Undoubtedly, as further data from the census is released, we will have evidence of the continuing progress of American blacks in education, occupational diversity, and income. We will have grounds for arguing that the effects of integration into a common people can be seen, at long last, among American blacks. And when it comes to the new waves



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of immigration of the past few decades, some will question whether the process of assimilation and incorporation, which has swallowed up so many groups and races and religions into a common American people, will continue to work its effects on the new groups now gathered together under the terms "Hispanic" and "Asian." Yet I believe it can be argued that this large distinction in the processes of assimilation and integration that has persisted during the three- or four-century history of American diversity—the distinction between blacks and others—still shows itself, and still poses some of the most difficult questions for American society.

## The first census

The distinction makes itself evident in the very history and structure of the census, and in the character of the data that it first presents to the public today. In the first census of 1790, required for purposes of apportionment by the U.S. Constitution adopted in 1787, the separation between blacks and whites was already made. Indeed, that separation was itself foreshadowed by the Constitution, which, in a famous compromise, decreed that "Representatives ... shall be apportioned among the several states ... according to their respective numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole number of free persons ... three-fifths of all other persons." Those "other persons" were slaves. The "three-fifths" was a compromise between excluding all slaves for purposes of apportionment (which would have reduced the weight of the Southern slave states in the union) or counting them simply as persons (which would have given the slave states too great weight).

The census could have fulfilled the requirements of the Constitution by counting only slaves. But what was to be done with free blacks? There were, even then, free blacks, but their civil status was sharply below that of whites. It was apparently decided that they could not be simply numbered among the "free persons" referred to in the Constitution but had to be clearly distinguished from whites. So the first census went beyond the Constitution: It counted "free white males and females" as one category, "slaves" as another, but then added a category of "all other free persons." The count of "other

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persons"—slaves—and "all other free persons"—free blacks—produced the total number of blacks. Thus from the beginning, white could be differentiated from black. That has remained the most enduring distinction in the U.S. census.

In that first census, following the apportionment provision of the Constitution, "Indians not taxed" were also excluded. Over time, this simple scheme has been extended to cover other races and ethnic groups as they entered the new nation through immigration, to a degree which is possibly unique among national censuses, and which we will explore below. But the census begins crucially with the distinction between white and black. As Clara Rodriguez writes in her book *Changing Race*:

> Between the drafting of the Constitution of 1787 and the taking of the first census in 1790, the term *white* became an explicit part of [the free population].... Theoretically, those in political charge could have chosen another definition for the [free population].... They could have chosen "free English-speaking males over sixteen" or "free males of Christian descent" or "of European descent." But they chose color. Having named the central category "white" gave a centrality and power to color that has continued throughout the history of the census.

But of course this reflected the centrality of the black-white distinction in American society and the American mind. Rodriguez goes on to note that on occasion in the pre-Civil War censuses "aliens and foreigners not naturalized," separately numbered, are combined in one table with native whites and citizens in a table of "total white." "In the 1850 census, the category 'free whites' is changed to simply 'whites,' which suggests by this time it was evident that all the people in this category were free."

## The color line

Color—race—has since been elaborated to a remarkable degree in the U.S. census. The most striking aspect of the American census of 2000—as of the few before—is that the short form, which goes to all American households, consists mostly of questions on race and "Hispanicity." Two large questions ask for the respondent's race, and whether the respondent is of "Spanish/Hispanic" origin, and both go into consid-

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erable detail in trying to determine just what race, and just what kind of "Hispanic," the respondent is. The race question lists many possibilities to choose from, including, to begin with, "white" and "black," and going on to "Indian (Amer.)," with an additional request to list the name of the tribe, "Eskimo," or "Aleut." And then under the general heading "Asian or Pacific Islander (API)," it lists as separate choices Chinese, Filipino, Hawaiian, Korean, Vietnamese, Japanese, Asian Indian, Samoan, Guamanian, "Other API," and finally "Other race (print name)." In the 2000 census, it was possible for the first time for the respondent to check more than one race. This change was made after an extended discussion in the 1990s about how to account for those with parents of different race, who wanted to check off both, or perhaps more than two.

The question on whether one is Spanish/Hispanic also goes on to list a range of possibilities: "Mexican, Mexican-Am. [for "American"], or Chicano" (to account for the fact that Mexican Americans choose different terms to describe themselves), "Puerto Rican," "Cuban," and "other Spanish/Hispanic," with again the request to write in one group. In the 1990 census, a host of examples—"Argentinean, Colombian, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Spaniard, and so on," was offered.

The observant and conscientious citizen may note that many other matters of interest to the census and the polity—whether one is of foreign birth or not, a citizen or not, and one's education, occupation, income, housing status, etc.—are all relegated to the long form, which goes to a large sample of citizens. And he may also ask why the census pays such great and meticulous attention to race and ethnicity (or rather one kind of ethnicity, that of Spanish-Hispanic background).

Many answers, going back to the first census of 1790, and before that, to the Constitution that prescribed a regular decennial census, and before that, to the first arrival of black slaves in the English colonies in the early seventeenth century, are available to explain why the first statistics the census makes available today, along with the raw number of the population in each state and locality, are those describing race and ethnicity. But there is also an immediate and proximate answer of much more recent currency: Congress requires that

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ethnic and racial statistics be available within a year of the census for the purpose of redrawing the boundaries of congressional districts, and the other electoral districts for state legislative assemblies, and for city and county elected officials.

Ethnic and racial statistics have become so significant for redistricting because of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Acts of 1965, and the latter's amendments of 1970, 1975, and 1982. Admittedly, these acts, which simply proscribe discrimination on the basis of race and national background, did not necessarily require such detailed statistics to check on the presence of discrimination in various spheres of life and, in particular, in the free exercise and effect of the vote. But the course of the law has been to use statistical tests to determine whether there is discrimination. The right enshrined in the Voting Rights statute, to the free exercise of the vote, has been extended through litigation and administrative and judicial rule-making to cover rights to the drawing of congressional and other district boundaries in such a way as to protect or enhance the ability of minority groups, blacks in particular, but others too, to elect representatives of their own group. If blacks are to be protected from discrimination, interpreted as the creation of voting districts that enhance the power of blacks to choose a black representative, if they are so inclined, then detailed statistics of how a race is distributed are necessary.

That is why the first statistics that come out of the census are those that make it possible to redraw district lines immediately on the basis of the new census, and for various groups to challenge the new district lines if they are aggrieved. "Growing minority groups will likely face lawsuits over redistricting," reads one news headline in the *Wall Street Journal*, with the subtitle, "One California assemblyman says his caucus 'will sue' regardless of the rationale for redrawing districts." The story tells us:

> Here in Orange County [California], ... a dozen Latino officials last week huddled in a spartan conference room over a map of Southern California as Art Montez, felt-tipped marker in hand, lopped the city of Westminster off the state's 68th Assembly District. Westminster's large population of conservative whites

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makes it "impossible for a minority candidate to win there," Mr. Montez, a political activist and school board member, explained to the group.

But this is only the beginning of a struggle that will move through the state legislature and almost inevitably to the Department of Justice and the Federal courts, where the racial and ethnic statistics and the role they have played in drawing up new districts will be carefully examined and disputed. For those with the responsibility of drawing up the new districts—the state legislatures primarily—the central concern is generally the maximization of the number of representatives of the party in power in the state legislature. A second concern is to maintain for the incumbents of the favored party district boundaries that secure their return. But overlaying these historic political reasons for drawing district lines, which courts accept in some measure as legitimate, is a new imperative, the protection of minority groups.

## The four "official" minorities

"Portrait of a Nation" is the title of a major story on the first results of the census in the *New York Times*, and it is accompanied by elaborate colored maps. The colors provide information on the distribution of the minority population—blacks, Hispanics, Asians, American Indians.

To explain how these have become *the* American minorities—to the exclusion of many other possible minorities—and why their numbers and distribution are in every newspaper report considered the most important information to look for in the census, would require a precis of American history. It is hardly necessary to explain why blacks are the first of the minority groups. They have been a significant presence in the United States and its predecessor colonies from the beginning. Our greatest national trauma—the Civil War—was directly occasioned by the problem of black slavery, and the most significant amendments to the Constitution became part of that quasi-sacred document in order to deal with the consequences of black slavery.

American Indians were there even before the beginning but were considered outside the society and polity unless they individually entered into non-Indian-American society, as many

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have, through intermarriage and assimilation. Their status has changed over time, from outside the polity as semi-sovereign foreign nations, to subjects almost without rights, to a population confined on reservations, to one that now increasingly becomes part of the society. Indeed, today, to be able to claim an American-Indian heritage is a plus for one's social status. This is too complex a history to be reviewed here. There is good reason to maintain a separate count of Indians, though there are great complexities in doing so.

"Hispanics," too, were there from before the beginning, if we take into account the Spaniards and Creoles moving up from Mexico who had already established colonial settlements in northern Mexico—what is now the Southwest of the United States—before the first English colonists had established permanent settlements on the Atlantic coast. Of course, they were not "Hispanics" then. Two hundred and fifty years later, this mixed population became part of the United States as a result of the annexation of the northern part of Mexico after the Mexican-American war. But it contained then a small population of Mexicans and Indians, and interestingly enough, despite the sense of racial difference felt by the Anglo-Americans, and despite the prejudice against Mexicans, they were not differentiated in the census as a separate group until 1930. Until then, one presumes, they were "white." In that year, Clara Rodriguez notes, a census publication, responding to the increase in immigration from Mexico as a result of the revolutionary wars and troubles of the 1920s, reported that "persons of Mexican birth or parentage who were not definitely reported as white or Indian were designated Mexican" and included in "other races." In 1940, this policy was changed, and Mexicans became white again. By 1950, added to the growing number of Mexicans in the Southwest, as a result of immigration in the previous decades, was a large number of Puerto Ricans in New York City, migrants from the island of Puerto Rico, which had been annexed after the Spanish-American war of 1898. In that census year, the two were combined in the census—along with smaller numbers of other groups—into a "Spanish-surnamed" group.

In the wake of Castro's victory in Cuba, a third large group of Latin Americans emigrated to the United States. Whether

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or not one could make a single meaningful category out of Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans, separated as they are by culture, history, and to some extent by racial characteristics, they were so combined, with a host of other Spanish-speaking groups, into a "Hispanic" category in the census of 1970. The creation of the category was a response to political pressure from Mexican Americans. It now includes large numbers of Nicaraguans, Guatemalans, Salvadorans, Dominicans, Colombians, Ecuadorians, and others fleeing the political and economic troubles of their homelands.

Racial and ethnic groups are conventionally described today as "constructed," but it is worth noting that this "construction" is not simply the result of white determinations—it is also the result of group insistence, at least to some degree. As Peter Skerry tells us in his book *Counting on the Census*:

> The finalized questionnaires for the 1970 census were already at the printers when a Mexican American member of the U.S. Interagency Committee on Mexican American affairs demanded that a specific Hispanic-origin question be included.... Over the opposition of Census Bureau officials, who argued against inclusion of an untested question so late in the process, [President] Nixon ordered the secretary of commerce and the census director to add the question.

And so "Hispanics" were born. The pressure to maintain the category, with all its subdistinctions, persists. The distinguished demographer Stanley Lieberson has written about a well-intentioned intervention at a conference preparatory to the 1990 census:

> I naively suggested that there was no reason to have an Hispanic question separate from the ethnic ancestry question [an ancestry question has been part of the long form since 1980] since the former ... could be classified as a subpart of the latter. Several participants from prominent Hispanic organizations were furious at such a proposal. They were furious, by the way, not at me (just a naive academic), rather it was in the form of a warning to census personnel of the consequences that would follow were this proposal to be taken seriously.

The last of the four minorities distinguished in the census is the "Asian," a creation—or construction—that has as complex a history as that of the Hispanic. Chinese and Japanese

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individuals were undoubtedly present in the United States before they were first listed as "races" in 1870—by then there was a substantial population of Chinese in California, and they were already the subject of racist legislation. In 1930, "Filipino," "Hindu" [sic], and "Korean" were added as separate races, and it became the pattern to add a new "race" for each Asian immigrant group as it became numerous. Eventually, we have the complex category of "Asian and Pacific Islander" (API), with all its listed subgroups.

As in the case of the Mexicans, the initial discrimination that made each of these a separate group was undoubtedly racist and reflected a sense of white superiority. The Asian groups were all subjected to discriminatory legislation. One could be naturalized as a citizen only if one were "white" (or, after the Civil War, black). All sorts of restrictions, from land ownership to the pursuit of certain professions or occupations, were imposed on them by various states because they were noncitizens. But Asian immigrants were denied because of race the right of becoming citizens. These groups were indeed nonwhite, but their separate classification was more than a matter of keeping neat statistics. An identity was being selected for a group felt to be inferior. This identity may well have been the one the members of the group would have chosen, but it was not they who decided they should be numbered aside from the dominant whites.

In more recent decades, the power to name and describe has shifted: The groups themselves, or those who speak for them, now shape how they are to be described, named, differentiated, and counted. And the political and administrative process bends to their desires. Why do we distinguish so many subgroups among the "Asian and Pacific Islanders"? There is a separate story for each category. But note one account by Peter Skerry from the political history of the census: The Census Bureau tried to simplify and shorten the Asian and Pacific Islander question for the 1990 census. Congressman Robert Matsui introduced legislation "in which the formatting of the API race question was spelled out, even to the point of stipulating that 'Taiwanese' be one of the subgroups.... It was only President Reagan's pocket veto that blocked this extraordinary degree of Congressional involvement in what is ordi-

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narily considered the technical side of questionnaire design."

## A melting pot?

These then are the four "official" minorities, though no law names these and only these as minorities. But what has happened then to all those others once considered "minorities," ethnic groups that were in the first quarter of the twentieth century in the eye of public attention because of the recency of their immigration, their lower social and economic status, and the concern that they could not be assimilated? Immigration was largely cut off by law in the 1920s because of these concerns. The United States has been a country of immigration since its origins, and by some measures the immigration of the first two decades of the twentieth century was much greater than the immigration of the last three decades, which has swelled the numbers of the new minorities. Had one picked up a book on American minorities and race relations in the 1950s, Jews might have been presented as the typical minority: Much of the social theory and social psychology on minority status was formulated with the position of Jews in mind. Jews were a major element in the mass immigration that preceded the present one, from the 1880s to the 1920s. Other major components of this immigration were Italians, Poles, Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Greeks, Armenians, Lebanese, Syrians, and many other peoples of Eastern and Southern Europe and the Near East. Are they no longer included in the story of American minorities?

One can go further back and ask, what has happened to the Irish, the Germans, the Swedes, Norwegians, and Danes, and the host of immigrants who came earlier and were also once sharply distinguished as separate groups, different from the founding group, the English? Does not the story of American diversity include all these too? How has the palette become restricted to the four minorities that play so large a role in the current census?

The simple answer is that integration and assimilation reduce over time the differences that distinguish one group from another, or from the original settler group, what Tocqueville called the "Anglo-Americans." We have no good term for this group. WASP ("White Anglo-Saxon Protestant") has been used

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in recent decades, ironically or derisively, for the founding element and their descendants. But aside from the necessity to distinguish such a group historically, no term is currently really necessary: Immigrants merge in two or three generations into a common American people, and ethnic distinctions become less and less meaningful. Ethnicity becomes symbolic, a matter of choice, to be noted on the basis of name or some other signifier on occasion, of little matter for most of one's life.

At one time, the census distinguished the foreign-born by place of birth, and the foreign-born parents of the native-born by place of birth, permitting us to track ethnic groups (somewhat uncertainly, owing to the lack of fit between ethnicity and national boundaries) for two generations. The rest of the population was classed as natives of native parentage, not further distinguishable, at least in the census, on the basis of their ethnicity. In 1980, the question on birthplace of parents was dropped, to the distress of sociologists and students of ethnicity. A new question on "ancestry" was added, which, in theory, would permit us to connect people to ethnic groups in the third generation and beyond. But the amount of mixture among groups, through marriage, is today such that the answers to the ancestry question, if one is not an immigrant or the child of an immigrant with a clear sense of ancestry, are not helpful in distinguishing an ethnic group much beyond the second generation. The answers then become so variable, so dependent on cues from the census itself—such as the examples the census form gives to the respondent regarding what is intended by the term "ancestry," which is by no means clear to many people—as to be hardly meaningful. It is a question that permits some 40 million Americans, seven times the population of Ireland, to declare that they are of "Irish" ancestry.

There are indeed differences of some significance based on ethnicity among the native white population, and sometimes these become evident—when home countries are involved in conflict, for example—or even paramount. This is particularly evident for Jews, who are marked not only as a religion (but the census rigorously refrains from asking any queston or accepting any response on religion) but also by ethnicity (but

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to the census, Jews are not an ethnic group but a religion). The exceptional history that resulted in the killing of most of the Jews of Europe, and the creation of a regularly imperiled State of Israel, ties Jews to their past and to their co-religionists abroad much more than other ethnic groups. They are not to be found in any census count—they are not a "race" and not even, for the census, an "ancestry," even though that answer would make sense for most Jews.

Sociologists and political scientists can plumb for differences among the native white population, and they will find not insignificant differences in income, occupation, political orientation, and so on. Jews, for example, are exceptional among "whites" for their regular overwhelming support for Democrats. Indeed, the differences among native whites, ethnically distinguished, may be greater than those among the official minority groups or between any of them and the native white population. Yet from the point of view of public opinion and official notice, these differences are not significant. The ethnic groups of the great immigrations of the nineteenth and early twentieth century have sunk below the horizon of official attention. They have merged into the "white" population, become integrated and assimilated, and only emerge as a special interest on occasion, stimulated by a conflict or crisis involving the home country.

## "Whiteness theory"

Recently, this somewhat benign view of American history, one in which immigrant groups steadily assimilate to, and become part of, the common American people, has been challenged by historians who argue that this was a strictly limited process, available only to whites, and, further, that many of those who were eventually included as full Americans had to overcome a presumption that they were not "really" white. In other words, race is crucial, both at its beginning and, by implication, throughout American history, for full inclusion. To take one powerful and clear statement of this position:

> The saga of European immigration has long been held up as proof of the openness of American society, the benign and absorptive powers of American capitalism, and the robust health of American democracy. "Ethnic inclusion," "ethnic mobility," and

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> "ethnic assimilation" on the European model set the standard upon which "America," as an ideal, is presumed to *work*; they provide the normative experience against which others are measured. But this pretty story suddenly fades once one recognizes how crucial Europeans' racial status as "free white persons" was to their gaining entrance in the first place; how profoundly dependent their racial inclusion was upon the racial exclusion of others; how racially accented the native resistance was even to *their* inclusion for something over half a century. [Matthew Frye Jacobsen, in *Whiteness of a Different Color.*]

The implication of this point of view is that the present minorities as commonly understood exist not only because of the recency of their immigration but primarily because of color: They are not white. Their ability to become full and equal participants in American society is thereby limited because of America's racist character.

But I believe these "whiteness theorists" are wrong. The racist character of the past is clear, and a degree of racism in the present is also evident, despite radical changes in public opinion and major changes in law and legal enforcement. But there has been a striking and irreversible change between the 1920s—when immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe was sharply reduced and immigration from Asia was banned entirely—and the postwar decades and, in particular, the period since the 1960s. Public institutions and significant private institutions today may only take account of race for the purpose of benefiting minorities.

The whiteness theorists may have a story to tell about the past, but it is one that has limited bearing on the present. The new immigrant groups are for the most part distinguished by race or quasi-racial characteristics from the population of European white origin. Yet it seems likely they progress pretty much at the same rate, affected by the same factors—their education and skills, their occupations, the areas of the country in which they settle, and the like—as the European immigrants of the past.

They merge into the common population at the same rate too. We will soon have analyses of marriages between persons of different race and ethnicity, to the extent the census makes possible, but we already know that the number and percentage of intermarriages between persons from the minorities

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and the majority has grown greatly in recent decades. One analysis of the 1990 census, reported by David T. Canon in his *Race, Redistricting and Representation*, shows that "for married people between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four, 70 percent of Asian women and 39 percent of Hispanic women have white [sic] husbands." But only 2 percent of black women in the same age group were married to white men. The theme of black difference contrasted with the intermixture and merger of other groups is clearly sounded in these and other statistics.

## The end of "race"?

The first studies conducted by independent analysts of the 2000 census statistics brought up sharply the degree to which blacks are still distinguished from other minorities or subgroups in the United States by residential segregation. "Analysis of Census Finds Segregation Along With Diversity," reads one headline. "Segregation" in this analysis is measured by the diversity of census tracts, as experienced by the "average" person of a given group or race. The average white person lives in a tract that is 80 percent white, down from 85 percent in 1990; the average black person lives in a tract that is 51 percent black, down from 56 percent in 1990; the average Hispanic is less "segregated" by this measure—his tract is 45 percent Hispanic, and increased from 43 percent in 1990. But one may explain this degree of segregation and its rise since 1990 by the huge increase, based on immigration, much of it illegal, of the Hispanic population. The average Asian lives in a tract that is not particularly Asian—18 percent, as against 15 percent in 1990. This rise reflects to some degree the 50 percent increase of the Asian population, mostly through immigration, in the decade.

Local reporting focused on the relative proportions of the minority groups in each community, and also on the degree of segregation. Integration proceeds, but slowly. There are black census tracts in Boston with almost no whites and white tracts with almost no blacks. We calculate these figures every census, as if watching a fever report. The overall picture is that the segregation of blacks is great, the segregation of Hispanic groups, despite the recency of their immigration and their

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foreign tongue, is rather less, and little segregation is noted among Asians.

The big news of the census was that "Hispanics" had for the first time surpassed blacks in number, but that was only the case if one excluded from the black population those individuals who had chosen the race "black" along with another race. Hispanics rose to 35.3 million, a 61 percent increase in 10 years; blacks rose by about 16 percent to 34.7 million, or 36.4 million if one added those who chose more than one race. Blacks are 12.3 percent of the population, about the same percentage they have maintained for the past century. The increase in Hispanics was much greater than expected: It was generally agreed that one reason for this increase was a larger number of illegal immigrants than had been previously calculated, 9 million according to one demographer instead of 7, perhaps as much as 11 million according to another demographer.

Making the comparison between the two largest minorities was complicated by the fact that respondents could choose more than one race for the first time, and 7 million did so. Analysis of these mixed-race choices, even reporting on them, is not easy. A reporter writes: "Five percent of blacks, 6 percent of Hispanics, 14 percent of Asians and 2.5 percent of whites identified themselves as multi-racial." But why are these multi-race choosers labeled "black" or "Asian"? Is the "one drop" rule once used by the southern states operating here? If someone chooses "American Indian" and another race, do we include that person in the count of American Indians? If we do, that would increase the number of American Indians by more than 50 percent. The Office of Management and Budget oversees the race and ethnic statistics compiled by federal agencies, and it has determined that for their purposes (affirmative-action monitoring and the like) all multi-race choosers who chose white and a minority race are to be counted as being part of the minority, a decision that has pleased minority advocates. But does it reflect how these individuals see themselves?

The mixed-race choices complicate the issue of choosing a base on which to measure the progress of, or possible discrimination against, minorities, an important step in affirma-

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tive action programs. That is the reason some minority leaders opposed allowing the mixed-race option. If the base becomes smaller, the degree of discrimination that one may claim in noting how many members of the group have attained this or that position is reduced.

Now that the option exists, it is clear many are eager to choose two or even more races. Among blacks there seems to be less willingness to choose two races than among Asians and American Indians—perhaps because it may be seen as something like race betrayal. But it is noteworthy that younger persons more often choose two races than older ones. If one creates a combined black group by putting together blacks with those who choose black as one of the races they tick off, 2.3 percent of this combined group 50 years of age or older turn out to be multi-race choosers, but 8.1 percent of those 17 and younger choose more than one race. But those who choose the option of black-white are still quite few—fewer in number than those who choose white-other ("other" in the racial category means Hispanic), or white-Asian, or white-American Indian.

When the statistics of intermarriage are analyzed, one can be sure there will be a considerable rise in white-black marriages since 1990, even if the percentage of such intermarriages is considerably less than white-Asian or Hispanic-non-Hispanic marriages. Blacks are still more segregated, more separated, in residence than other minority groups. They are more sharply defined in their consciousness as separate: History has made them so. But even among blacks, one sees the process of assimilation and integration, as measured by choice of race and by intermarriage, at work. By the census of 2010 or 2020, these processes will be further advanced. Indeed, one may perhaps look forward to a time when our complex system of racial and ethnic counting is made so confusing by the number of possible choices, singular and multiple, that the whole scheme is abandoned. Many Americans hope so.

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# The surprising consensus on school choice

JAY P. GREENE

THERE has been a flurry of activity in school choice research in the last few years. As a result, where we used to have only theories and limited evidence we now have a relatively solid understanding of the likely effects of school choice. I say "relatively" because all research is necessarily imperfect and additional study can always improve the confidence with which we draw conclusions. But the research on school choice includes several random-assignment studies, the "gold-standard" of research design, where subjects are randomly assigned to treatment and control groups as in a medical study. I can think of only one other education policy issue (the effect of class-size reduction) that has been the subject of even one significant random-assignment experiment, let alone several "gold-standard" studies.

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*An earlier version of this article was published as a Civic Report by the Manhattan Institute. An expanded version will appear in the book* Charters, Vouchers, and Public Education, *forthcoming from the Brookings Institution.*



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What is striking about the recent research on school choice is not just its quality but that it consistently reveals positive benefits from school choice. Of course, groups with vested interests in the results, such as the teachers' unions and their allies, always prefer to describe the results as mixed or inconclusive at best. (The tobacco industry similarly used to describe the research on smoking and cancer as mixed or inconclusive at best.) Meanwhile, journalists prefer covering controversy and fear crossing those who oppose school choice, so they describe results as mixed or inconclusive as well. And researchers have incentives to highlight disagreements with each other as a matter of academic pride and professional competition, which also helps obscure the general success of school choice programs.

The research on school choice essentially addresses three questions: (1) Does school choice benefit those who receive a school voucher? (2) Does it benefit students who do not actively choose a school (or as it is sometimes negatively framed, "those left behind")? and (3) How does school choice affect integration and the democratic ideals that we may wish schools to promote? The research on the first question, does choice benefit "choosers," is the strongest and most consistently positive. Whether choice benefits "nonchoosers" is more difficult to study, and therefore the evidence is less conclusive on that question, although recent research suggests benefits for choosers and nonchoosers alike. The last question, whether choice poses a threat to our democratic system, has been the least studied, perhaps because it is so central to popular faith in the public school. (Like any central myth, people prefer not to examine it too closely.) But some recent research suggests that choice may enhance the ability of schools to promote democratic ideals. Let us consider the evidence on each of these three questions in turn.

## Does school choice benefit choosers?

One indication of the academic effects of school choice on choosers is whether they report being more satisfied with their school experience than do nonchoosers. Here the evidence in support of school choice is unambiguously and overwhelmingly positive. John Witte, one of the evaluators of the school

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choice program in Milwaukee, reported that "satisfaction of Choice parents with private schools was just as dramatic as dissatisfaction was with prior public schools." In Cleveland, evaluator Kim Metcalf found that "across the range of school elements, parents of scholarship students tend to be much more satisfied with their child's school than other parents. Scholarship recipient parents are more satisfied with the child's teachers, more satisfied with the academic standards at the child's school, more satisfied with order and discipline, more satisfied with social activities at the school." Also in Cleveland, Paul Peterson, William Howell, and I found that after two years of the program, choice parents were significantly more satisfied with almost all aspects of their children's education than was a random sample of parents from Cleveland public schools. Nearly 50 percent of choice parents reported being very satisfied with the academic program, safety, discipline, and teaching of moral values in their private school. Only around 30 percent of Cleveland public school parents report being very satisfied with these aspects of their children's schools. Very similar results were obtained from the privately funded school choice programs in Charlotte, Washington, D.C., Dayton, New York City, and San Antonio.

If this were almost any other policy realm or consumer issue, we might consider the strong positive effect of school choice on parental satisfaction sufficient evidence that the program benefits its participants. If, for example, people report that they are happier with the maintenance of public parks, we would usually consider this sufficient proof that efforts to improve the parks have succeeded. We would not feel obliged to count the number of items of trash and repair problems to verify reports of satisfaction.

But the standards for assessing programs in education are different. Many in the education and policy communities only give serious consideration to standardized test scores, and give little credence to parental satisfaction. They suspect that parents are not informed consumers of education or experience psychological pressures to justify their choices, making their assessments of program success unreliable. To put it bluntly, they suspect that parents are stupid. And thus, despite the overwhelmingly positive effects of school choice on parental

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satisfaction, these findings have not significantly influenced the policy debate.

## Testing school choice

Instead, the debate has focused mainly on the effect of school choice on standardized test scores. These score results, including those from several "gold-standard" random-assignment experiments, have also been consistently positive, which gives them enormous credibility. In the last few years, there have been seven analyses of random-assignment school choice experiments, from five different programs, conducted by several different researchers. Every one of those analyses finds statistically significant benefits from school choice for those who are provided with opportunities to choose a private school.

For example, in New York City, Washington, D.C., Dayton, Ohio, and Charlotte, North Carolina, privately funded programs offered scholarships for private school. Because there were many more applicants than scholarships available, scholarships were awarded by lottery, allowing for the "gold-standard" random-assignment research design. Comparing the standardized test scores of those students who won scholarships to the scores of those who lost the lottery allows researchers to identify with confidence the effect of receiving a voucher. Since we can expect the two groups to be generally alike, differences in academic achievement between them are probably the result of the voucher, not differences in backgrounds or motivations.

The results from New York City, Washington, and Dayton were contained in a report issued by the Harvard Program on Education Policy and Governance (PEPG). The PEPG report found that after two years in private school, African-American recipients of the scholarships performed significantly better on standardized tests than did the African-American members of the control group that applied for a scholarship but were not given one by lottery. The benefit of receiving one of these privately funded vouchers in New York was about 4 percentile points, in Dayton about 7 percentile points, and in Washington about 9 percentile points. Interestingly, the PEPG report found that receiving the scholarship had no significant academic effect, good or ill, for students of any other ethnic group.

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A second group, Mathematica Policy Research of Washington, D.C., the research company that was involved in collecting the data in New York for PEPG, conducted their own analyses of the New York data and issued their own report. Contrary to a misleading article in the *New York Times*, the findings from the Mathematica and PEPG studies were essentially the same. In fact, Mathematica calculated the average benefit for African-American students receiving a scholarship to be one-tenth of a percentile point higher than that reported by PEPG.

The only difference between the Mathematica and PEPG analyses of the New York results—a difference fully exploited by the *New York Times* in the throes of the presidential campaign—was the spin that each report placed on the findings. The Mathematica report preferred to emphasize the results broken down by grade, while the PEPG report focused on the average for African-American students across all grades. Breaking down the results by grade produced very small samples for each grade, so that the positive effect of receiving a voucher was only statistically significant in sixth grade, but not significant in two of the other three grades studied. Mathematica expressed worries that the benefit of the scholarship might not be widespread and therefore advised against drawing any conclusions. PEPG focused instead on the statistically significant benefit for African-American students across all grades and, in light of the similar results from other cities, felt comfortable drawing a stronger conclusion than Mathematica did.

The difference between the two approaches can be illustrated by thinking about presidential campaign polls. Let's say that a national poll found Gore was ahead of Bush by seven points. Let's then say someone wanted to break down the results by state, even though the sample in each state is fairly small, and found that only in California was the Gore lead statistically significant. Would it then be more reasonable to conclude that Gore and Bush were tied or that Gore was ahead? The PEPG interpretation of the results is analogous to focusing on the national poll results, and the Mathematica interpretation is analogous to focusing on breaking down those results by state, even though the number of subjects is very few.

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All of this discussion of the different interpretations, however, obscures a basic truth: Both the PEPG and Mathematica analyses of results from a high-quality random-assignment school choice experiment in New York find statistically significant benefits from school choice. And the PEPG report finds statistically significant benefits from the other two programs it covered, in Dayton and Washington, D.C.

Three other analyses of random-assignment choice experiments confirm the existence of academic benefits. My own analysis of the privately funded scholarship program in Charlotte found that students given by lottery a voucher to attend private school outperformed their counterparts who failed to win a voucher by 6 percentile points after one year's time. I was unable to determine whether benefits occurred exclusively for African-American students because more than three-quarters of the students in the Charlotte study were African American, leaving too few students from other groups about which to draw conclusions.

Two analyses of random-assignment data from the publicly funded school choice program in Milwaukee also found significant gains for students who received vouchers to attend private schools. One study, by Paul Peterson, Jiangtao Du, and myself, found that students who won lotteries to receive a voucher scored 6 percentile points higher on their reading scores and 11 percentile points higher on their math scores than students who did not receive a voucher. Cecelia Rouse, a Princeton University economist and former member of the Clinton administration, independently analyzed the data from Milwaukee and arrived at similar results, at least in math scores. After trying several analytical strategies Rouse concluded: "Students selected for the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program ... likely scored 1.5-2.3 percentile points *per year* in math more than students in the comparison groups."

## The big picture

In addition to these seven random-assignment studies, there have been three nonrandom-assignment studies of publicly funded school choice programs. The quality of these nonrandom-assignment studies (including one I conducted) is so much lower than the quality of the random-assignment studies that

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less weight should be given to their results. But it is striking that these lower-quality studies are also generally positive in their findings.

For example, the Cleveland choice program offers evidence on the academic effects of choice, but of lower quality because there are no random-assignment data nor sufficient data on the background characteristics of choice- and public-school families. Despite these data limitations, analyses of test scores have been performed by Kim Metcalf of the Indiana University School of Education and by myself, Paul Peterson, and William Howell. Both groups found at least some significant academic benefits of the choice program in Cleveland.

Metcalf observed that "the results [after two years] indicate that scholarship students in existing private schools had significantly higher test scores than public school students in language (45.0 versus 40.0) and science (40.0 versus 36.0). However, there were no statistically significant differences between these groups on any of the other scores." Metcalf's analyses were based on a comparison between one grade cohort of choice students and a nonrandom sample of public school students. He had a very limited set of controls for background differences, which could seriously bias results. But Metcalf still saw fit to conclude in favor of school choice:

> The scholarship program effectively serves the population of families and children for which it was intended and developed. The program was designed to serve low-income students while maintaining the racial composition of the Cleveland Public Schools.... The majority of children who participate in the program are unlikely to have enrolled in a private school without a scholarship.

The analyses performed by myself, Peterson, and Howell also had serious data limitations. We only had test scores from two private schools, although those schools did contain nearly 15 percent of all choice students and nearly 25 percent of all choice students who had transferred from public schools. We were only able to compare scores from students over time relative to how they scored when they first entered these two schools. But since inner-city students tend to have declining scores relative to national norms over time, any gains in test scores over time should be a strong indicator of academic progress for the choice students. We found that after two

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years students at the two schools we examined had gains of 7.5 national percentile points (NPR) in reading and 15.6 NPR in math. These gains were achieved even though the students at these two schools were among the most disadvantaged students in Cleveland. Thus, despite shortcomings in the available data, there were indications of significant academic benefits for choice students in Cleveland.

Rather than getting lost in the details of these various studies, it is worth stepping back and reviewing the results as a whole. There have been seven random-assignment and three nonrandom-assignment studies of school choice programs in the last few years. The authors of all 10 studies find at least some benefits from the programs and recommend their continuation, if not expansion. No study finds a significant harm to student achievement from the school choice programs. The probability that all 10 studies would be wrong is astronomically low. It is also worth noting that the private schools participating in these various school choice programs tend to have per pupil operating costs that are nearly half the per pupil expenditure in the public schools. Even if we were to find no significant academic benefit from school choice, we might still endorse the policy because parents like it, and because it costs half as much money to produce the same level of academic achievement. To increase student achievement significantly, while spending less money per pupil and making parents more satisfied, as the evidence from these 10 studies consistently shows, provides strong support for school choice.

## Does school choice benefit nonchoosers?

If choice helps its beneficiaries, does it do so at the expense of others? The suspicion is that choice programs "cream" the best students from the public schools, draining talent and resources from the public system. On the other hand, it is possible that "creaming" has largely already occurred in the public system. Higher-achieving students and more affluent and involved families may have already chosen a public or private school that suits them, leaving "the rest behind." In fact, the U.S. Department of Education estimates that 59 percent of students currently attend "chosen" schools. But many of the remaining 41 percent lack the financial resources to

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move to a desired public school district or pay private school tuition. Can vouchers exacerbate the situation in a way that harms nonchoosing families?

As we have already seen, evaluations of the Milwaukee and Cleveland programs have concluded that the programs successfully targeted very low-income families, offering them opportunities they would otherwise lack. The average income of families participating in the Milwaukee program was $10,860. In Cleveland, the mean family income was $18,750; in New York, $10,540; in Washington, D.C., $17,774; and in Dayton, $17,681. In Milwaukee, 76 percent of choice students were from single, female-headed households. In Cleveland, the figure was 70 percent. In Washington it was 77 percent, and in Dayton it was 76 percent. The standardized tests scores of choice students before they began private school averaged below the 31st percentile in Milwaukee, below the 27th percentile in New York, below the 33rd percentile in D.C., and below the 26th percentile in Dayton. In other words, choice students were generally performing in the bottom third academically. If this is cream, then none of us need go on a diet.

The most damaging thing one could say about all of these choice programs with respect to "creaming" is that they probably attract the more capable of the disadvantaged poor. But if this is "creaming," then Food Stamps, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, and virtually all other antipoverty programs engage in it. These programs generally fail to serve the most dysfunctional of the poor, because these persons have difficulty taking full advantage of the programs designed to help them. This is normally seen not as an indictment against antipoverty efforts but rather as an unfortunate reality that all programs must face. Like these other antipoverty programs, school choice programs can be designed to target disadvantaged populations, even if they do not always reach the most disadvantaged of the disadvantaged.

## The choice challenge

But showing that school choice does not "cream" the best students does not address whether public schools respond effectively to the challenge of school choice. Does the quality of education improve for those who remain in traditional public

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schools? Studying this issue is difficult. None of the current school choice pilot programs is large enough or has existed long enough to allow researchers to detect with certainty the effects of choice programs on public schools. It is true that the Milwaukee public school district, home to the largest and longest-running choice program, has dramatically increased the number of public school choice programs to retain students who might be drawn to the private school choice program. The Milwaukee public schools have also promised parents that their children will read at grade level by the third grade or they can receive individual tutoring. The promise is advertised on billboards and the sides of buses to make people want to "choose" the public schools. This attentiveness to the needs of students in Milwaukee suggests that the school district has constructively responded to the challenge of school choice. But these reports from Milwaukee are little more than anecdotes and are not the kind of evidence that social scientists require.

The evidence from a new evaluation I conducted of the A-Plus choice and accountability program in Florida provides stronger systematic evidence that the prospect of vouchers inspires significant academic improvement in public schools. Under the A-Plus program, students in schools that had received two failing grades from the state would be offered vouchers to attend a private or a different public school. I compared the changes in test scores of Florida schools that had received a failing grade to those of other schools in the state and found that the test-score gains of schools facing the imminent prospect of vouchers were more than twice as large as the gains realized by the other schools. When Florida schools had to compete to retain their students under a choice system, they made substantial progress.

Some studies address the effects of school choice on public school improvement by examining whether areas with more choice tend to have higher student test scores than areas with less choice. Harvard economist Caroline Minter Hoxby examines the effect of choice on the quality of public and private schools by using a very innovative research strategy. Hoxby takes advantage of the fact that some families currently exercise choice by moving to different school districts within a metropolitan area or by paying the tuition to send their chil-

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dren to private school. Some metropolitan areas have more choices available than others because some have more school districts and more private schools. For example, Boston has several school districts in the metropolitan area (Boston, Brookline, Cambridge, Waltham, etc.), while Miami has only one school district for the entire county.

Hoxby examines whether the availability of more choices is related to higher academic achievement. As one would expect, given most economic theory, the metropolitan areas in her study with more choices available have higher academic performance at lower cost than do metropolitan areas with fewer choices available. A one standard deviation increase in the available public school district choices results in a 3 percentile point improvement in test scores and a 4 percent increase in wages for students upon entering the work force, all for 17 percent less per capita expenditure. A one standard deviation increase in choices offered by the private sector results in an 8 percentile point improvement in test scores and a 12 percent increase in wages for students upon entering the work force, without any significant change in per capita expenditure. Hoxby concludes: "If private schools in any area receive sufficient resources to subsidize each student by $1,000, the achievement of *public* school students rises." Choice appears to help the nonchoosers as well as the choosers.

A similar study that I conducted for the Manhattan Institute, called the Education Freedom Index, produced similar results. We measured the extent of educational choices currently available to families in each state, including charter school choices, subsidized private school choices, homeschooling choices, and public school choices. Controlling for per pupil spending, median household income, class size, and racial composition, states that offered more choices to families in the education of their children had significantly higher student test scores. When parents have more choices, schools pay greater attention to the needs of students because families may withdraw their children and the accompanying resources.

Clearly, we could have more direct and conclusive research than these three studies on whether school choice improves the quality of education for nonchoosers as well as choosers.

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For that kind of evidence, we would need to have a number of large-scale voucher programs that were in existence for several years. We could compare the overall educational achievement in districts with large-scale school choice programs to comparable districts that did not have voucher programs to see if vouchers helped spur schools to improve. The evidence at this point certainly suggests that such large-scale choice programs are worth trying. We have seen that the mechanism by which some worry that choice will undermine the quality of public schools, the "creaming" off of the best students, has not occurred in the several choice programs that have been studied. And it is important to note that existing school choices, particularly the ability of wealthier families to move to different school districts or attendance zones, produce a considerable amount of "creaming" before voucher programs are introduced. We have also seen that the studies of school choice without vouchers show that when it is easier for more families to exercise such choices, school quality is higher.

## Promoting civic ideals

Even if some were convinced that school choice could improve academic achievement for choosers and nonchoosers alike, they might still be wary of vouchers' possible effect on education's civic purposes. Our system of government-operated schools was developed to ensure the transmission of desired civic values to future generations, as much as to impart economically useful skills. Oddly, however, while promoting democratic principles is a central mission of public schools, there is virtually no evidence to support the claim that government control of schools is necessary to achieve this goal. For many persons, even academics, the importance of government control of schools for promoting civic ideals is simply an article of faith.

Some recent studies, however, cast doubt on whether government management of schools is necessary or even desirable for promoting civic ideals. In one study, several colleagues and I analyzed responses from the Latino National Political Survey (LNPS), a national sample of adult Latinos. Subjects were asked whether they went to a public, private, or foreign

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school for each grade. They were also asked about their willingness to let members of their least-liked group engage in political activities such as running for office or holding demonstrations. Respondents in these kinds of studies most often identify the Ku Klux Klan as their least-liked group; Latinos most often picked gay activists. The more willing people are to allow members of their least-liked group to participate in these activities, the more tolerant they are said to be. Controlling for a variety of background characteristics, we found that adult Latinos who had been educated mostly in private school were more likely to be tolerant than those who had been educated mostly in public or foreign schools. The effect was moderate, but significant. Latinos who received their education entirely in private school were willing to tolerate the political activities of their least-liked group 50 percent of the time, compared to 39 percent for Latinos who never attended private school, holding all other factors constant.

In another study, headed by Patrick Wolf of the Brookings Institution, a sample of college students was asked similar questions about their willingness to allow members of their least-liked group to engage in certain political activities. Again, controlling statistically for differences in the students' backgrounds, the more time students spent in private school before college, the more tolerant they were.

Harvard University researcher David Campbell examined a large national data set of secondary school students that contained a limited set of tolerance items focusing on whether students would tolerate antireligious activities. Campbell found that Catholic school and secular private school students are more likely to be tolerant than are public school students. Secular, Catholic, and other religious private school students also outperformed their public school counterparts on other civic measures, including their experience with volunteering and their willingness to engage in public speaking or write letters on public issues.

Rather than being the bastions of intolerance they are sometimes imagined to be, private schools and religious schools appear to be more successful than public schools at instilling tolerance in their students. And remarkably, this private school advantage appears to last into the adult lives of their students.

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## Racial integration

But does this tolerance in private schools extend to racial integration? School choice has a bad reputation on this issue because vouchers were endorsed in the 1960s by some southern segregationists who wanted to evade court orders to integrate schools. Vouchers do have this shameful history, but government-controlled public schools have a shameful history of their own, having been segregated by law in much of the country for almost a century. The desirability of school choice with regard to racial integration should be judged by the policy's merits, not its pedigree.

In the last few years, a number of studies have examined the effect of school choice on racial integration. In one study, I examined the racial composition of a random sample of public and private school classrooms collected by the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS). I found that private school students were significantly less likely to be in racially homogenous classrooms. Fifty-five percent of public school students were in classrooms that were almost entirely white or almost entirely minority in their racial composition, while 41 percent of private school students were similarly segregated. When all families choose their schools, as they do in the private sector, more of their children end up in racially mixed educational settings than when most families were assigned to schools, as they are in the public sector. Choice appears conducive to integration, while government assignment to public school appears to encourage segregation.

In another study, several colleagues and I observed a random sample of public and private school lunchrooms in Austin and San Antonio, Texas, and recorded where students sat by race. We found that private school students were significantly more likely to be in racially mixed groups at lunch than were public school students. After adjusting for seating restrictions, school size, and student grade level, we found that 79 percent of private school students were in racially mixed groups, compared to 43 percent of public school students. Sitting in a racially mixed group was defined as having any one of five adjacent students being of a different racial or ethnic group. We found that religious private schools were better integrated than were secular schools, suggesting that the low tuition typi-

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cally found at religious schools helped contribute to racial integration. If vouchers or tax-credits further reduced the financial barriers to private school attendance, integration in private schools might be even better.

We also found that public schools with more students from outside their attendance zones—that is, with more magnet or transfer students—had higher rates of integration. It appears that choice systems, where schooling is detached from housing, are better able to transcend racial segregation in housing patterns. Traditional public schools, on the other hand, appear to replicate and perhaps reinforce racial segregation in housing.

Recent work by Stanford economist Thomas Nechyba arrives at similar conclusions about segregation by income. Based on policy simulations, Nechyba finds that "by removing education-related incentives for high-income households to separate themselves from poor neighborhoods, vouchers introduce a desegregating force into society. [And] by reducing housing prices in high quality public school districts and raising them in low quality districts, vouchers help more low-income families afford to live in areas with better public schools." In other words, by attaching schooling to housing, the public school system has created distortions in the racial mix and pricing of housing. Housing prices are artificially high in areas with desirable public schools and artificially low in areas with undesirable public schools, contributing to sorting of housing patterns by income (and race). By detaching schooling from housing, school choice makes it easier for wealthier families to stay in economically mixed neighborhoods. And by reducing the premium placed on housing in areas with good schools, vouchers make it easier for poorer families to move into those areas. It is no wonder that vouchers are most strongly supported by poor inner-city residents and most vigorously opposed by well-to-do suburbanites.

But these findings are based on examinations of existing private schools or policy simulations. What would the effects of an actual choice program be on integration? The Cleveland and Milwaukee school choice programs offer some answers. Following a strategy similar to that used to examine the data from NELS, I looked at whether choice students in Cleveland were more likely to attend schools that were racially represen-

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tative of the broader community and less likely to attend racially homogeneous schools than were public school students. I found that nearly one-fifth of recipients of a voucher in Cleveland attend private schools that have a racial composition that resembles the average racial composition of the Cleveland area (defined as having a proportion of minority students in the school that is within 10 percent of the average proportion of minorities in metropolitan Cleveland). Only 5 percent of public school students in the Cleveland metropolitan area are in comparably integrated schools. More than three-fifths of public school students in metropolitan Cleveland attend schools that are almost entirely white or almost entirely minority in their racial composition. Half of the students in the Cleveland Scholarship Program are in comparably segregated schools. The amount of integration is not great in either system, but it is markedly better in the choice program.

When Howard Fuller and George Mitchell of Marquette University examined racial integration data from Milwaukee, their findings were similar to those from Cleveland. In 1998-99, they observed that 58 percent of Milwaukee public elementary students attended schools with more than 90 percent or fewer than 10 percent minority students. Only 38 percent of elementary school students at a large sample of Milwaukee Catholic schools were in similarly segregated schools. In 1998-99, Catholic schools accounted for more than half of the growth of choice students in the Milwaukee voucher program.

The public systems in Cleveland and Milwaukee, despite years of busing and other forced desegregation efforts, produce highly segregated schools. Desegregation has failed in those districts because white parents lack faith in the public schools' ability to manage integration successfully, and consequently have fled to the suburbs. The school choice programs in those cities allow families to transcend racial segregation in housing by selecting a racially mixed school in which they have confidence. And families are more likely to attend racially mixed schools by means of vouchers than through their ability to purchase housing in areas with desired schools.

Contrary to popular myth, private schools are neither bastions for intolerance nor segregation. In fact, private control of schools appears to promote the civic purposes of education

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more effectively than government control of schools.

## A new consensus?

Reviewing the recent evidence on the effects of school choice leaves us with a few basic conclusions. First, all seven random-assignment studies and all three nonrandom-assignment studies found important benefits for the families that participate in choice programs. Second, choice does not appear to "cream" the best students. In all studies of existing choice programs, the evidence shows that participants have very low family incomes, predominantly come from single-mother households, and have a prior record of low academic performance. Third, the existing choice programs are not large enough nor have they operated long enough to address definitively the effects, positive or negative, on the public school system. However, the results from the A-Plus program in Florida suggest that the prospect of vouchers may induce public schools to improve. And Caroline Minter Hoxby's work finds that metropolitan areas with more choices available have significantly better outcomes at lower cost, and my work on the Education Freedom Index finds that states that offer more choices to parents enjoy higher student achievement. From these studies, we can conclude that choice is likely to improve public schools. Finally, private schools are more likely to be integrated and to promote civic virtues like tolerance than public schools.

Of course, considerably more research needs to be done on these questions before the conventional wisdom among the media and among academic and policy elites might be changed. This is especially the case since even gold-standard studies that reveal consistently positive benefits from school choice are likely to be interpreted in the least favorable light possible by choice opponents. But if the evidence we have so far is any indication, future studies will only confirm what we are already beginning to suspect: school choice works. Eventually, the weight of this evidence will make it hard to ignore or disparage.

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# Revamping special education

WADE F. HORN & DOUGLAS TYNAN

PRIOR to the 1950s, the federal government was not routinely involved in the education of children with special needs. A few federal laws had been passed to provide direct educational benefits to persons with disabilities, mostly in the form of grants to states for residential asylums for the "deaf and dumb, and to promote education of the blind." These laws, however, were in the tradition of providing residential arrangements for persons with serious disabilities, services that had existed since colonial times.

Absent federal law, how—and even whether—children with disabilities were to be educated within the public schools was left to the discretion of the states and their local school districts. Although some public schools undoubtedly provided exceptional services to children with disabilities, others did not. Indeed, as recently as 1973, perhaps as many as one million

*A longer version of this essay appears in* Rethinking Special Education for a New Century *(Washington, D.C.: Progressive Policy Institute and Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2001).*



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students were denied enrollment in public schools solely on the basis of their disability.

This state of affairs changed dramatically in 1975 with the passage of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142). Renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990, this landmark legislation mandated that children with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. Critical components of the law include requirements for an initial evaluation to determine eligibility for services and accommodations, individual education planning, the provision of individualized services, and procedural safeguards to ensure the active involvement of a child's parents.

The good news is that IDEA has been largely successful in opening up educational opportunities for children with disabilities. The bad news is that IDEA, as too frequently happens with public-policy initiatives, has had some unintended negative consequences as well.

## The growth of special education

In 1999-2000, 6.1 million children ages 3 to 21 years were found eligible for special-education services and accommodations, up from 3.7 million in 1976-77—an increase of 65 percent. The growing number of children in special education is not solely a function of an increase in the overall student population but also of a growth in the proportion of students claiming to be in need of special education. Specifically, 12.8 percent of the resident student population received special-education services and accommodations in 1997-98, compared to 8.3 percent of the resident student population in 1976-77.

There are several reasons why both the number and percentage of children identified as qualifying for special education under IDEA have grown so rapidly in recent decades. First, since passage of PL 94-142, both Congress and the Department of Education have responded to pressure from advocacy groups by broadening the definition of students eligible for special education. For example, children who are three to five years old are now eligible for services under the IDEA, as are children with autism and traumatic brain injuries.

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Even more significantly, in 1991 the Department of Education issued a "policy clarification" indicating that children diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may be eligible for special-education services and accommodations under the "other health impaired" category of IDEA. On March 12, 1999, the department codified this policy clarification into law when it published regulations that, among other things, revised the definition of the "other health impaired" disability category by adding both ADD and ADHD as qualifying conditions. Given the extraordinary increase in the number of children diagnosed in recent years as having ADD or ADHD, the inclusion of these two diagnoses under "other health impaired" virtually assures continued growth in the number of students served through special education.

Second, the number of children identified under the category "specific learning disability," or SLD, has increased enormously. SLD is not a single disorder, but a category of special education that includes disabilities in any of seven areas: listening, speaking, basic reading of words, reading comprehension, written expression, mathematics problem-solving, and mathematics calculations. SLD is not synonymous with reading disability or dyslexia, although it is frequently misinterpreted as such, probably because the vast majority of children identified with SLD have reading deficits.

In 1976-77, at the inception of IDEA, 796,000 children, or 22 percent of the total special-education population, were identified as having a specific learning disability. By 1997-98, that number had grown to 2,726,000, or 46 percent of the total number of students in special education—an increase of 233 percent since 1976-77. In contrast, the number of children in all of the other disability categories combined increased only 13 percent during the same time period.

The increase in the number of students diagnosed with SLD would not be a problem if, in fact, we were simply better today at identifying students with SLD than in the past. There is, however, no universally accepted, validated test or diagnostic criteria to determine the presence or absence of learning disabilities. Nor is there a clear line of demarcation between students who have milder forms of SLDs and those

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who do not have SLDs. This lack of clear definitions and objective diagnostic criteria makes it possible to diagnose almost any low- or underachieving child as having an SLD. According to James Ysseldyke, director of the National Center on Educational Outcomes at the University of Minnesota, over 80 percent of all schoolchildren in the United States could qualify as having an SLD under one definition or another.

Third, many suspect that some school districts place nondisabled but low-achieving students into special-education classes in order to obtain state and federal funds that are available only after a child is identified as disabled under IDEA. While it is unlikely that children without any learning difficulties are being placed in special education, not every low-achieving child is also disabled. But when services are provided to low-achieving, nondisabled students in regular education, local school districts cannot claim reimbursement for the cost of these services, even if they are exactly the same as those provided to students with disabilities. This funding structure provides an enormous financial incentive for local school districts to identify merely low-achieving students as disabled.

Fourth, recent education reform efforts to hold schools more accountable for student outcomes may also be responsible for some of the increase in the population of special-education students. Until recently, students identified as receiving services under special education were not generally required to participate in state-wide assessments. Given that merit raises, promotions, and bonuses for both principals and teachers often ride on the results of state-wide exams, the temptation exists for local school districts to raise their scores artificially by excluding the participation of low-achieving special-education students in state-wide assessments. Although the 1997 amendments to the IDEA were intended to prohibit this practice, three states (Kentucky, Louisiana, and South Carolina) that recently enjoyed large gains on national reading tests also saw large increases in the percentage of special-education students excluded from taking the tests.

Finally, parents themselves have contributed to the growth in special education. Not long ago, being in special education carried with it a certain amount of social stigma. Today, due in large part to the success of disability advocacy groups, this

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stigma has lessened considerably. Instead, what special education offers today is the possibility of such attractive accommodations as the assistance of a personal tutor, a laptop computer, extra or even unlimited time on classroom tests and college entrance exams, a personal note-taker, and immunity from punishment when the student violates rules because of his disability.

The fact that eligibility for special education entitles one to an array of often expensive services and accommodations may help explain why, for example, nearly one in three high school students are officially designated as disabled in affluent Greenwich, Connecticut. It may also explain why clinicians in wealthier suburban communities frequently report upsurges in parental requests for diagnostic evaluations, especially for SLD and ADD, just as high school students are preparing to take college entrance exams. Indeed, while children from families with more than $100,000 in annual income account for just 13 percent of the SAT test-taking population, they make up 27 percent of those who receive special accommodations when taking the SAT.

## Rising costs

As might be expected, the consequence of these trends is the skyrocketing cost of special education, often at the expense of regular education. According to the National School Boards Association, the per-pupil cost of special education is 2.1 times the cost of regular education. Since the average per-pupil expenditure in the United States is about $6,200, the average cost for students in special education is about $13,000 annually. Hence, the average *excess* cost of special education is $6,800 per pupil. Since IDEA covers 6.1 million children ages 3 to 21, the total cost of special education for these children is $79.3 billion, which is $41.5 billion more than a regular education would cost for them.

Under IDEA, the federal government is supposed to pay 40 percent of the costs of special education. In reality, federal funding has never exceeded 12.5 percent. Today, Washington provides $5 billion in total funding to local school districts, or about 12 percent of the costs of special education. On average, states pay 56 percent of the costs, with a range of 11

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percent to 95 percent. The remaining average of 32 percent is paid for by local school districts. Thus, IDEA is perhaps the largest unfunded federal mandate for education ever placed on state and local government. Recently, Senator Jim Jeffords of Vermont has called for an increase in federal funding over the next five years from the current 5 billion dollars annually to 37 billion dollars, which would approach the 40 percent funding suggested in 1975. To date, Senator Jeffords' efforts have resulted only in a nonbinding resolution, and not actual dollars.

Making matters worse, since special education (unlike regular education) is a federal mandate, schools can be sued for not providing the services that parents think their child deserves. This has led some school districts to spend extraordinary sums on special-education placements, services, and accommodations in order to avoid even more costly lawsuits. The Economic Policy Institute estimates that each year special education absorbs 38 cents of every new tax dollar raised for the public schools.

A particularly expensive result of qualifying a child for special education is the possibility that in doing so, a public school may be obligating itself to pay for all or part of a child's private school tuition in the event that public schools cannot accommodate their needs. In fact, public school districts today pay for the private school tuition of more than 100,000 special-education students at an estimated cost of $2 billion annually, and part of the cost of private schooling for an additional 66,000 special-education students. An extreme example of this is a southern California school district that, as reported in the *Washington Monthly*, pays for a severely brain-damaged boy to attend a specialized school in Massachusetts, flying his parents and sister out for regular visits, at an annual cost of $254,000.

One consequence of these escalating costs may be the eventual weakening of public support for special education. As ever increasing numbers of children are determined eligible for ever more expensive special-education services, the public's confidence in the special-education system may gradually erode. If so, the public may overreact and demand the abandonment of special education, leaving severely disabled children once

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again without public education. Indeed, in a recent Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll, 65 percent of parents said that the extra attention paid by instructors and classroom assistants to disabled students came at the expense of their own children.

### Training for a lifetime of entitlement

Another consequence of the expansion of disability categories is that low- and underachieving students are being handled by an "accommodation model," when other approaches—prevention, intervention, and compensatory strategies—would better suit their needs. When initially passed in 1975, PL 94-142 was largely intended to ensure that students with significant physical and sensory disabilities were not denied a free and appropriate public education. For these students, the right approach was, and remains, to make public education accessible through the use of access ramps for those in wheelchairs, books written in Braille for the blind, and sign-language interpreters for the deaf. There was no expectation that special education would, by itself, ameliorate the physical or sensory handicap, thereby making these accommodations no longer necessary.

There are, however, subgroups of students with disabilities for whom it is reasonable to expect that special education will help them overcome or compensate for their handicapping condition, so that they no longer need special services or accommodations. For example, special education ought to ameliorate emotional and behavioral disorders so that students with these disorders no longer need alternative placements. Similarly, when working with students with SLD, ADD, and ADHD, the goal should be to help them learn self-directed compensatory strategies so they can succeed without the aid of special services. For example, children with ADHD could be taught, through guided practice and positive reinforcement, how to use an assignment pad and how to better organize their backpacks or desks. An accommodation strategy would merely assign an aide to keep track of the student's work. In other words, for many in special education the goal can—and should—be independence, rather than a lifetime of dependence on special accommodations, often at taxpayers' expense.

Unfortunately, special education has largely failed to help

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most of its students achieve such independence. Instead, most special-education students under IDEA can expect to receive its services and accommodations until they leave school. According to data collected from 16 states in 1993 by the Department of Education, only 1 to 12 percent of special-education students over the age of 14 years are declassified each year. Other policy developments, such as the accommodations provided under the Americans with Disabilities Act, reinforce the tendency toward permanent accommodations for disabilities, even those that can be remediated.

Contributing further to this problem is the focus within both the federal and state systems on due process requirements and fiscal management rather than educational results. Local schools are told they are "doing it right" when they strictly adhere to the procedures that govern eligibility for services and, once a child is found eligible, the development of an Individual Education Plan (IEP). A committee comprised of school personnel and the child's parents puts together the IEP, which sets specific goals for the child and identifies settings in which the child is to achieve those goals. Current oversight efforts also focus on whether schools provide parents with proper procedural safeguards and responsibly draw down funds. Federal accountability systems pay little attention to whether students in special education are advancing in core subjects or acquiring the skills to make special education no longer necessary.

It's questionable whether many of the accommodations typically provided to special-education students are even doing what proponents advocate. For an accommodation to be useful, it should demonstrate "differential advantage" for special-education students. That is, the accommodation—whether giving extended time to complete a test, allowing students to have the instructions and test questions read aloud to them, or using large-print or Braille forms of the test—should improve the scores of students with disabilities above and beyond improvements that students without disabilities might achieve if they were provided with the same accommodation. We know, for example, that the use of large print does provide a differential advantage to students with vision impairment. When students with vision impairment and those with-

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out take the same large-print test, their scores are comparable. If they take a standard small-print test, those with vision impairment do worse. Clearly, the use of large print helps to level the playing field.

Unfortunately, some accommodations routinely provided to special-education students have not demonstrated such differential advantage. Take, for example, the provision of extra time to take tests. According to research by Lynn Fuchs and her colleagues at Vanderbilt University, giving more time on conventional math and reading tests does not help grade school students diagnosed with learning disabilities any more than it does non-learning-disabled students, although it may provide a differential advantage on more complicated math tests that require extensive reading and writing. Moreover, although studies by the College Board have found that providing extended time on the SATs increases the scores of students with learning disabilities by an average of 45 points on verbal and 38 points on math, no studies have yet been done to determine whether giving more time on the SATs satisfies the requirement for differential advantage.

Another way to determine whether an accommodation is appropriate is to examine its effects on the test's predictive validity—the extent to which accommodation enhances or reduces the test's ability to predict an outcome or measure the underlying ability it was designed to measure. One danger in providing accommodations to special-education students is that the altered test may no longer validly assess the ability or skill it was created to assess, or predict the outcome it was designed to predict. This seems to be the case for at least some accommodations routinely provided to special-education students. Research has generally found, for example, that giving students with learning disabilities extra time on the SAT tends to predict greater college success than these students actually achieve.

## Disciplinary immunity

What these various accommodations do seem to accomplish is this: Students in special education come to believe that they are entitled to operate under a different set of rules from everyone else. Nowhere is this more evident than in how

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school disciplinary rules are differently applied to students in special education and those in regular education.

According to the "stay put" provisions of IDEA, once placement in special education has begun, it can only be changed by the IEP committee. If the student's parents do not consent to a change in placement and request a hearing, the student must "stay put" in the current placement until the hearing process is concluded. Suspensions that last longer than 10 days (or have the cumulative impact of more than 10 days) and expulsions are considered a change in placement and hence prohibited under the "stay put" provisions of the IDEA.

There are two exceptions to this. First, disciplinary sanctions of 10 days or less are not considered a change in placement and consequently are not subject to this restriction (although if the current suspension combined with earlier suspensions would total over 10 days, the student could not be suspended). Second, a school can propose disciplinary sanctions greater than 10 days and expulsions if it believes the misbehavior is not related to the disability. If, however, the parent disagrees and requests a hearing, the student must "stay put" in his or her current placement.

The "stay put" provision can lead to situations in which two students, one in regular education and the other in special education, both bring weapons or an illegal substance to school, yet only the student in regular education is suspended or expelled. This situation is not merely hypothetical. Several years ago, a group of six students in Fairfax County, Virginia, brought a .357 magnum handgun onto school property. Five of the students were expelled. The sixth was not. The reason? He was classified as "learning disabled" with a specific weakness in "written language skills."

This is not an isolated episode. In another case, also in Fairfax County, five gang members used a meat hook to assault another student. Only three of the perpetrators were expelled. The other two were special-education students. When then Virginia governor George Allen tried to challenge the wisdom of using federal law to protect violent special-education students, the Clinton administration threatened to pull millions of dollars in federal education spending from the state.

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Due to these and other examples of problems arising from the "stay put" provision, Congress in 1997 passed amendments to IDEA giving schools more latitude in disciplining violent special-education students. For example, in situations involving a "substantial likelihood" of injury, a hearing officer may unilaterally place a student involved with weapons or drugs in an alternative educational setting. For this to occur, however, the school must show that it had made reasonable efforts to minimize the risk of harm in the current placement, "including the use of supplementary aids and services." Furthermore, if the recommendation is expulsion, the IEP team must conduct a review to determine whether the misconduct was a manifestation of the child's disability. If so, no expulsion.

These qualifications continue to ensure that special-education students are treated differently from regular students in cases of serious violations of school rules. Indeed, in April 1999, the National School Boards Association urged federal lawmakers to further amend IDEA to provide greater flexibility to suspend, expel, or reassign students whose misconduct jeopardizes safety or unreasonably disrupts classroom learning.

## Unrealistic expectations

The end result of special education's focus on process rather than outcome, accommodations rather than prevention and intervention, and exceptions to disciplinary codes rather than uniform enforcement is that many special-education students see their disability as a rationale for a lifetime of entitlements. This expectation brings its own negative consequences. For example, while it is true that many colleges offer accommodations to students with disabilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the extensive supports of special education required under IDEA generally do not apply to colleges and universities. Thus many students with disabilities, having grown used to special accommodations in primary and secondary schools, are confronted with a harsher reality when they enter college or the workforce.

Take, for example, the case of *Bartlett v. New York Board of Law Examiners* (1997). In this case, Marilyn Bartlett, a former special-education student who had failed to pass the New York bar exam on five previous occasions, argued that

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she was entitled to unlimited time to take the bar exam because her reading disorder qualified her for special accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The U.S. Second Court of Appeals subsequently ruled that she was not entitled to unlimited time to take the bar exam because, as evidenced by the fact that she had standardized reading test scores in the average range, she had successfully compensated for her reading disability.

What this case illustrates is that special education has largely lost sight of the appropriate "end game." As originally intended, IDEA was designed to integrate children with special needs into the mainstream of American life. Today, in far too many instances, special education serves to separate, not integrate, through the use of exceptional rules and procedures not available to nondisabled students. In effect, special education has ceased to see its mission as teaching compensatory and coping skills so that students can participate fully in the mainstream of American society. Instead, it encourages a sense of lifetime entitlement to special accommodations.

## Three levels of disability

The first step toward reform of special education is to recognize that the system currently includes three fundamentally distinct populations: (1) those with significant developmental disabilities and sensory and physical handicaps; (2) those with milder forms of neurological conditions, such as learning disabilities and attention deficit disorder; and (3) those with conduct or behavioral problems. Currently, despite some carefully developed individual programs, over 90 percent of children in special education receive similar services. The interests of all students would be served if special education were redesigned to better address the very different needs of its subgroups.

The first group, for which the original law was passed, consists of children born with birth defects, serious sensory or physical disabilities, and significant cognitive delays. In the vast majority of such cases, these children are identified as disabled during infancy and the preschool years, frequently by health-care professionals or early-childhood education specialists, and begin receiving intervention services before they en-

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ter elementary school. For these children, there is no need for an elaborate identification process within the schools. Long before they enter kindergarten, we know who they are and to a large extent understand their medical, rehabilitation, and educational needs.

The key to educating these students, who comprise fewer than 10 percent of all children in the special-education system, and less than 1 percent of all children in school, is to adequately fund appropriate accommodations (e.g., interpreters for the deaf, curb cuts for those in wheelchairs, books written in Braille for the blind, and so forth), while including them as much as possible in the education mainstream. To a large extent, this is what special education currently provides these students. Their right to have access to a free and appropriate education must be maintained under any change in the structure of special education.

The second, and by far the largest, group of students currently in special education comprises those with mild forms of neurological dysfunction, such as mild mental retardation, learning disabilities, and ADD. The question that needs to be asked about these students, especially given the emphasis under the 1997 IDEA amendments on their inclusion in the regular classroom, is: What is so "special" about the special education they receive?

In many cases, the answer is not much, except that they are classified differently from their peers. Research shows that the most effective educational strategies for this group of students are the same ones that help most students in regular education. These include frequent individualized monitoring and feedback and intensive direct instruction. What this group of special-education students needs is not an entirely different teaching approach or set of strategies, but good teaching—albeit with greater consistency, intensity, and slower pacing than other students are likely to require.

Thus, rather than perpetuating the myth that students with relatively mild disabilities are receiving a different kind of instruction compared to nondisabled students, we should adjust regular education so as to keep these students in the regular classroom. Indeed, Robert Sternberg and Elena Grigorenko of the Yale Child Study Center, as well as Reid

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Lyon of the National Institutes of Health, assert that reading disabilities, the most common form of learning disability, are the result not so much of neurological dysfunction as of the method by which most schools currently teach reading. If all schools were to teach phonological awareness, sound-symbol relationships, and reading comprehension, and do so effectively and early, most reading problems could be avoided. For those relatively few children who develop reading problems despite this approach, the regular education teacher could implement in-class interventions, perhaps with the assistance of a reading specialist. In this way, reading problems would be addressed in a regular classroom, rather than being referred to special-education programs.

This approach is in marked contrast to the current system, which emphasizes identification rather than intervention, and which hardly involves the classroom teacher. If, for example, a child is falling behind in reading, under the current system a referral is made for testing his reading level and establishing an estimate of his IQ. A psychologist and a reading specialist typically do this evaluation, not the teacher who sees the child each day. From the start, the process is largely disengaged from what goes on in the classroom.

An alternative model would involve a functional analysis of reading done by the teacher, perhaps with the help of a psychologist and reading specialist. Instead of being concerned with documenting an IQ-achievement discrepancy score, time would be spent analyzing the particular reading problem experienced by an individual child. By using actual classroom samples of reading, supplemented by some additional testing materials, the child's reading ability could be assessed in far less time and with far less expense than the current system of formal educational and IQ testing. This model aims at helping the child to develop the skills and coping mechanisms necessary to achieve at higher levels in school, not simply accommodating his disability.

A similar approach could be used for children with ADD and ADHD. A recently published large-scale treatment study of students with ADHD found the best outcomes among those children who received a combination of relatively low doses of medication, a classroom behavior-modification program, and

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behavioral family therapy to help the parents better manage their child's home behavior. Rather than being taught to rely on medication to manage their symptoms, the children in the combination treatment were taught, both at home and in school, the skills necessary to maintain behavioral control even in the absence of medication. These results suggest that students with ADD would benefit more if schools adopted obvious rules and boundaries with clear consequences for good and bad behavior, rather than relying on medication alone to enhance educational performance.

The third major subgroup of students currently receiving special education comprises those with conduct or behavioral problems. Students with these types of disorders, when seen in the mental-health system, are usually diagnosed as having either "oppositional defiant disorder" or "conduct disorder," characterized by refusals to comply with requests, emotional overreaction to situations, and failure to take responsibility for their own actions.

Effective treatment of these disorders involves making these individuals strictly accountable for their behavior, insisting on compliance with requests, and helping them learn to cope calmly with stressful situations. Unfortunately, once these students are identified as in need of special education, many of the accommodations routinely provided to them—most especially a lowered standard of acceptable behavior—actually undermine these desirable goals. This sets up these students for later failure, as they frequently come to expect the same kinds of accommodations outside the school as well. They will be disappointed, since most non-academic spheres—from job markets to the criminal justice system—are far less accommodating of disruptive behavior.

An alternative approach would be to develop school- and system-wide efforts to reduce these problems overall, rather than classifying and then segregating individual students. For example, staff training for public school teachers and administrators undertaken by the May Institute in New England resulted in a considerable improvement in behavior and a reduction in referrals to special education. In one city, a school-wide program to reinforce compliance with rules resulted in a 40 percent drop in detentions. In a second, the need for

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special-education placements was reduced almost three-fold after implementation of a positive reinforcement program for rule compliance, at a cost of less than $10 per year per child. At another school, a program incorporating positive reinforcement for compliance and close monitoring of behavior was implemented at a cost of only $30 per elementary school student. The result was a 30 percent reduction in disciplinary referrals to the principal.

It is questionable whether students who persist in defying rules despite such efforts should be included within the framework of special education at all. It is a fine line to distinguish between a psychiatric disorder that can be treated and criminal behavior that should be adjudicated, a distinction made even more difficult in the high school years.

## Funding reforms

Currently, schools draw down special-education funds based on the number of students identified as having a qualifying disability under IDEA. As noted earlier, this creates an incentive to identify low-achieving students as disabled. If the current system resulted in substantial improvements in educational outcomes for these students, there would be less need for reform. But evidence is mixed at best as to whether student performance is enhanced by placement in special education.

One reform advocated by some is to move to census-based funding for special education. Under such a scheme, funding for special education would be based not on the number of children identified as in need of special education but on total student enrollment. Census-based funding has the advantage of providing schools with the flexibility to set up school-wide programs to enhance learning and good behavior. (Although the 1997 amendments to the IDEA allowed some movement in this direction, identification and classification remain the focus of the system.) Critics, however, worry that census-based funding provides schools with little incentive to provide the more expensive accommodations and services needed by the severely disabled, and does not necessarily lead to better results for students with disabilities.

Moreover, census-based funding does not take into account

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differences that may exist across school districts in the percentage of students with severe disabilities requiring intensive special-education services. An imbalance can occur, for example, when parents of severely disabled children move their children into a school district near a specialized medical facility. Even a quirk of fate can cause an overrepresentation of students with severe disabilities in some school districts. For example, a Pennsylvania school district of only 400 K-12 students includes a pair of severely autistic twins and a child with a severe head injury. Under census-based funding, such districts would be unfairly penalized financially. One remedy would be for schools to identify that relatively small group of children who have severe special needs and have state government help fund local programs for this population.

To increase accountability for improving educational outcomes for disabled students, funding could be based on the number of students who achieve the goals set forth in their Individual Education Plans, rather than simply the number of students identified as in need of special education. This, however, may result in the lowering of IEP goals. An alternative would be to use the current state-wide assessment tests and differentiate the scores of students in regular education from the scores of students in special education. Under the assumption that the purpose of special education is to improve the academic performance of these students, schools would be held accountable for measurable gains over time in the special-education population relative to those in regular education.

## Reforms with results

Special education today is costly and ineffective. The elaborate eligibility and classification systems set up in response to well-meaning federal legislation have not translated into improved results for students with special needs. Moreover, by focusing on weaknesses and accommodations, we have given these children unreasonable expectations of how the larger community will respond to their academic weaknesses. As a result, many special-education students have a rude awakening in store for them when they arrive at college or enter the job market.

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A major overhaul of special education is needed to ensure that the original goal of offering an appropriate education for all children is achieved, while, at the same time, as many students as possible are integrated into the mainstream of American life. To accomplish this, we must first recognize that special education, as currently constructed, really serves three distinct groups of students: those with significant physical, cognitive, and sensory handicaps, those with milder forms of neurological dysfunction such as SLD and ADD, and those with behavioral disorders. An improved education system would take into account the differing needs of these subgroups of special-education students and would encourage the development of coping and compensatory strategies. Our approach to disabilities must be reformed so that the principle of equal access to education translates into better practical results for students with special needs. In short, it is time to make special education "special" once again.

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# Learning from James Coleman

RICHARD D. KAHLENBERG

WHEN James S. Coleman died in 1995, the headline in the *New York Times* obituary read "Work Helped to Foster Busing"—an interesting epitaph for someone whom many also considered to be one of the original neoconservatives. What Bayard Rustin said of the white working class applies with equal force to the eminent University of Chicago sociologist: "The question is not whether this group is liberal or conservative, for it is both."

At a time when Washington is talking about "common ground" on education, it is appropriate to revisit Coleman's uncommon thinking on the issue. The author of 30 books and numerous articles, many of which appeared in the pages of this journal, Coleman contributed mightily to our understanding of education in America. Spanning 35 years, his work has

*This is the seventh in our occasional series of "Reconsiderations." Previous essays have examined the works of Louis Hartz, Richard M. Titmuss, Herbert Croly, Marshall McLuhan, Frederick Douglass, and Bertrand de Jouvenel.*



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much to say about the limitations of the education reforms under consideration, as well as the prospects for more promising, but less discussed, alternatives.

Coleman's sociological research ranged over a number of topics, from "social capital" to adolescent behavior. This article looks at three important contributions by Coleman to the education debate: *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, widely known as the Coleman Report, published in 1966; Coleman's study of school busing and white flight in the 1970s; and his research in the 1980s on the advantages of private schools. Several important principles emerge from this body of research: that social composition is more important than school spending, that socioeconomic integration is more important than racial integration, and that social capital of the sort found in Catholic schools is vital to improving our educational system. Taken together, these principles point toward reform of public education that transcends the conservative-liberal divide.

## The 1966 Coleman Report

An obscure provision in the 1964 Civil Rights Act called for a study of inequality of opportunity in education "by reason of race, color, religion, or national origin." The general assumption of educators, indeed Coleman's assumption, was that the funding differences between black and white schools would be large, and that these differences would provide the central explanation for unequal achievements of blacks and whites. In 1966, after conducting what was then the second largest social science research project in history—involving 600,000 children in 4,000 schools nationally—Coleman and his colleagues issued *Equality of Educational Opportunity*. It became, according to journalist Nicholas Lemann, "probably the single best-known piece of quantitative social science in American history," and it contained a number of surprising findings. First, the disparities in funding between schools attended by blacks and whites were far smaller than anticipated. Second, funding was not closely related to achievement; family economic status was far more predictive. Third, a different kind of resource—peers—mattered a great deal. Going to school with middle-class peers was an advantage, while going to school

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with lower-class peers was a disadvantage, above and beyond an individual's family circumstances.

Today, in public memory, Coleman's report has been largely reduced to the second proposition: that "family matters more than schooling" and that "education spending is unrelated to achievement." But while Coleman found that family background was the central explanation for student achievement, he also believed school inequality made things worse. In the Summer 1966 issue of *The Public Interest*,† he noted that minority children start first grade behind white peers in reading and math achievement, on average, but they "have an even more serious deficiency at the end of school, which is obviously in part a result of the school." Harvard's Thomas Pettigrew noted: "Never once was it said that schools make no difference. The belief that Coleman hit was the belief that you could make a difference with money."

Although Coleman discovered that expenditures were not closely related to achievement, the report found that a student's achievement appears to be "strongly related to the educational backgrounds and aspirations of the other students in the school.... Children from a given family background, when put in schools of different social compositions, will achieve at quite different levels." Writing in *The Public Interest*, Coleman was even more forceful: "The educational resources provided by a child's fellow students are more important for his achievement than are the resources provided by the school board." The Coleman Report concluded that "the social composition of the student body is more highly related to achievement, independent of the student's own social background, than is any school factor."

The bad news, Coleman noted in the *Harvard Educational Review*, was that the characteristics that mattered least (facilities and curriculum) were the most equal between schools attended by blacks and schools attended by whites, while the factor that mattered most (the socioeconomic background of fellow students) was the most unequally distributed. The policy implications were obvious to Coleman: "The results clearly suggest that school integration across socioeconomic lines (and

† "Equal Schools or Equal Students?" *The Public Interest*, Number 4, Summer 1966.

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hence across racial lines) will increase Negro achievement, and they throw serious doubt upon the effectiveness of policies designed to increase non-personal resources in the school."

The positive finding about the role of peers excited policy makers as much as the negative findings about spending disappointed them. In a free society, there are limits to what can be done to address inequality of opportunity that stems from family background. But it is appropriate to take steps to ensure that schools provide equal opportunity, for one of the purposes of education is to enable children to overcome the accident of parental social position. Thus, at the time of the Coleman Report's publication, policy makers latched onto its evidence of the importance of a school's social class mix.

In particular, Coleman's discoveries were embraced and promoted by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then a professor at Harvard. In the 1967-68 academic year, Moynihan organized a faculty seminar to analyze the Coleman Report and discuss its policy implications. The seminar proceedings were published in a collection edited by Moynihan and Frederick Mosteller, who summarized Coleman's findings as follows: On the one hand, average per pupil expenditure accounted for less than 1 percent of the variance in educational achievement, "nothing approaching the assumed relationship"; on the other hand, "students mattered. The higher the social class of other students the higher any given student's achievement." In a 1967 interview, Moynihan noted that "the Coleman study makes a very strong case that equality of educational achievement in the American school system depends at least as much on who you go to school with as what kind of school you go to.... The big difference is the social class mix, and that really has nothing to do with the facilities as such."

Critics pointed out that Coleman's report was not longitudinal—it examined just a snapshot in time—and thus its conclusions might reflect what is known as self-selection bias: Blacks and low-income students in racially and economically integrated schools might just be more motivated than those in segregated schools. But numerous subsequent studies sought to correct for this bias, looking longitudinally at the growth in achievement over time, and confirmed that middle-class schools

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provide a better educational environment than poverty-concentrated schools.

## Learning by association

Coleman's conclusion that peers mattered more than resources was considered shocking at the time, but it ultimately confirmed what most parents intuitively believe. Coleman noted that colleagues were at first surprised by the report's findings, "but then they think back to their own educational experience and about the things they consider in trying to select a school for their children, and they realize what their own criteria are for 'a good school.' And they are no longer surprised."

Coleman found that peers influenced learning in a number of ways. First, classmates influence each other's aspirations: "Particular individuals who might never consider dropping out if they were in a different high school might decide to drop out if they attended a school where many boys and girls did so," the Coleman Report noted. Because low-income children drop out at substantially higher rates than middle-class students, peer influence in a middle-class school has positive effects, on average. While we might like to think that the teacher sets the tone in a class, Coleman's earlier research, published in *Adolescent Society* (1961), clearly established the primacy of peers. Coleman's survey of 10 high schools found that students were 14 times as likely to say it was harder to accept the disapproval of peers than of teachers.

In addition, Coleman noted, the curriculum is likely to be more robust in middle-class schools than lower-income ones, creating a patent unfairness. "It is one thing to take as a given that approximately 70 percent of an entering high school freshman class will not attend college, but to assign a particular child to a curriculum designed for that 70 percent closes off for that child the opportunity to attend college." Coleman was not concerned that low-income children would be overwhelmed in middle-class schools; while a more academically challenging environment could cause a certain amount of "trauma," he said, the "psychological discomforts are not lasting." Likewise, Coleman argued, predominantly low-income schools are much more likely to experience "enormous degrees of student disorder," which inhibits education. In these schools, Coleman said,

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"major attention is given to discipline rather than learning."

Coleman also found that students learn vocabulary and other academic basics from one another, making it an advantage to attend school with students from well-educated backgrounds. For example, he observed, "going to school with other children whose vocabulary is larger than one's own demands and creates a larger vocabulary." Indeed, low-income kids enter school with a vocabulary about half the size of that of middle-class children. By analogy, Coleman said, just as an English-speaking child "will learn French more quickly in a classroom of French children than from the best French teacher," a low-income child exposed to a middle-class environment will naturally expand his vocabulary. This economic assimilation, Coleman believed, was central to the purpose of public education. While it was true that standardized tests were biased in favor of middle-class culture, he wrote, "what they measure are the skills which are among the most important in our society for getting a good job and moving up to a better one."

But if having middle-class peers is a positive influence on low-income children, might not the reverse also be true? Wouldn't middle-class children be harmed by association with low-income children? Coleman claimed not: "The results indicate that heterogeneity of race and heterogeneity of family educational background can increase the achievement of children from weak educational backgrounds with no adverse effect on children from strong educational backgrounds." How could this be the case? First, the Coleman Report found that low-income children were more affected by student environment than middle-class children. Integration was "asymmetric in its effects," having "its greatest effect on those from educationally deficient backgrounds." Blacks, for example, were twice as affected by school social environment as whites. Coleman explained that in middle-class families, aspirations and achievement were more firmly rooted because there was a greater likelihood of adult supervision; by contrast, in single-parent households, more time was spent with peers. Likewise, Coleman found, because middle-class children were, on average, learning a lot at home, the additional gains from peers and teachers were comparatively smaller than for lower-income children. The finding of differential sensitivity, wrote E.D. Hirsch,

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"may be denominated 'Coleman's Law,'" and it has been replicated in several subsequent studies.

Second, the Coleman Report suggested that there was a threshold or "tipping point" at which the negative effects of peer poverty become much greater. Numbers matter, in part because the numerical majority in a school sets the tone. As Coleman explained, "Cultural dominance of middle-class norms prevail in middle-class schools with a teacher teaching toward those standards and with students striving to maintain those standards. Conversely, in a predominantly lower-class school, standards prevail that are oftentimes antischool and that are oriented toward lack of performance or low performance in school." He estimated that the threshold was around 60 percent middle class; that is, middle-class achievement would not decline in a 40 percent low-income school, but might at 50 percent and surely would at 90 percent.

Consider the issue of discipline. Coleman noted that "disorder clearly comes from lower-class schools." In a school in which "70 or 80 percent of the children are undisciplined in their ordinary behavior pattern, then the values of the classroom are going to be undisciplined." By contrast, the theory is that in predominantly middle-class schools, "children who themselves may be undisciplined, coming into classrooms that are highly disciplined, would take on the characteristics of their classmates and be governed by the norms of the classroom." School discipline, he concluded, is "very much a function of the proportion of lower-class pupils in the classroom."

Coleman's research on this question has been ratified by numerous studies of racial desegregation. Even the most vocal opponents of busing agree that white scores did not decline with integration. David Armor, for example, noted in 1995 that "virtually all studies of desegregation and achievement have found little or no change in achievement or other educational outcomes for white students."

## Redefining equal opportunity

The other important contribution of the Coleman Report was conceptual. Coleman believed that equal educational opportunity should be redefined, so that it would no longer be measured by equal inputs—equal spending, teachers, and fa-

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cilities. Rather, the focus would be on achieving academic results that were independent of family background. As Coleman wrote in *The Public Interest* in 1966, "Schools are successful only insofar as they reduce the dependence of a child's opportunities upon his social origins.... Thus equality of educational opportunity implies, not merely 'equal' schools, but equally effective schools, whose influences will overcome the differences in starting point of children from different social groups." Returning to the theme in a 1967 *Public Interest* article, Coleman observed: "This is a task far more ambitious than has ever been attempted by any society: not just to offer, in a passive way, equal access to educational resources, but to provide an educational environment that will free a child's potentialities for learning from the inequalities imposed upon him by the accident of birth into one or another home and social environment."†

As a practical matter, ensuring a healthy economic mix of students is considerably more challenging, politically and logistically, than writing government checks to provide more equality in financial resources. Many progressives continued to push for equal and compensatory spending, despite the Coleman Report's pessimistic findings on this score. In 1970, John Coons, William Clune, and Stephen Sugarman published a book, *Private Wealth and Public Education*, which argued that there is a constitutional right to equality in educational spending. Coleman wrote an introduction to the volume in which he praised its authors but also questioned their focus. The book's subject, "financial resources," left unaddressed "a second kind of educational resource, in the form of other children in a school," he wrote. Following the book's logic, but turning it toward a more ambitious goal, Coleman argued: "The educational resources available to each child in a school includes as an important component the educational backgrounds of the other children in the school—and any state which dictates the school or school district to which each child goes is unequally distributing those educational resources, however equally it is distributing financing."

That same year, testifying before the U.S. Senate Select

† "Toward Open Schools," *The Public Interest*, Number 9, Fall 1967.

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Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity, Coleman pointed out that disadvantaged students attending segregated schools are "deprived of the most effective educational resources contained in the schools: those brought by other children as a result of their home environment." He also testified in support of integration in a Denver, Colorado, desegregation suit during that time period.

In 1972, Coleman sat for a rare interview to discuss a program in Duluth, Minnesota, designed to better integrate the school's student population by economic status. He told the *Saturday Review of Education* that he was encouraged that Duluth officials were facing up to the new reality of residential segregation by class. Because of this segregation, conscious steps must be taken if we are to recreate "the common American school that was characteristic of our past and that is important to provide equal educational opportunities." Coleman said that research continued to show that "a child's performance, especially a working-class child's performance, is greatly benefited by his going to a school with children who come from educationally stronger backgrounds." Coleman declared flatly: "A child's learning is a function more of the characteristics of his classmates than those of the teacher."

## Race and busing

The Coleman Report had suggested that the economic status of students in a school, rather than its racial makeup, was the key factor driving school quality. It concluded that the "beneficial effect of a student body with a high proportion of white students comes not from racial composition per se but from the better educational background and higher educational aspirations that are, on the average, found among whites." The implication, Coleman noted, was that poor blacks and whites would benefit from attending middle-class white or black schools, and that poor blacks would not benefit academically from attending low-income white schools. This finding was replicated in subsequent studies, and was endorsed by Moynihan, among others, who in a 1967 interview urged that "we should begin to see that the underlying reality is not race but social class."

However, in part for legal reasons, and in part for cultural

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and political reasons, Coleman's findings about the importance of the economic class of peers were translated into a discussion of racial integration. *Brown v. Board of Education* provided the legal basis for promoting integration by race, and the Constitution said nothing about integration by class. Relying on Coleman's research, in 1967 the U.S. Civil Rights Commission issued a report entitled *Racial Isolation*, which called for legislation providing that no school be more than 50 percent black.

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw an explosion in school desegregation, as the Supreme Court lost patience with implementation of *Brown* by "all deliberate speed" and endorsed busing to desegregate schools. But the moment was short-lived, and in 1974 school desegregation was significantly curtailed by the Court's decision in *Milliken v. Bradley*. Because the Court read *Brown* to apply only to *de jure* segregation, most suburban jurisdictions, not responsible for segregation in cities, would be exempt from desegregation orders. Around the same time, Coleman, who had become known as the "father of busing" because of the support the Coleman Report provided for a strategy of school integration over compensatory spending, began to raise serious questions about the policy.

First, Coleman's research in the mid 1970s questioned the efficacy of forced racial busing when confined to urban districts. In 1975, he co-authored a report for the Urban Institute, *Trends in School Segregation, 1968-73*, which found that, because of the departure of white families, desegregation orders within a given district often had the effect of creating greater segregation between districts. Examining 19 cities, 8 of which had desegregation plans and 11 of which did not, Coleman found that while all the districts saw some white flight, those experiencing school desegregation saw white flight at four times the rate expected. "Ironically," he wrote, "'desegregation' may be increasing segregation."

Second, because *Milliken* exempted most suburban districts, racial desegregation orders, particularly in the North, often failed to promote the more educationally important byproduct of economic integration. In places like Boston, racial desegregation essentially involved integrating poor and working-class whites with poor and working-class blacks. Coleman noted that

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because the plan "involved primarily lower-class communities ... with most of the higher-achieving middle-class schools in the suburbs," it was unlikely to yield "beneficial effects on achievement."

Because *Brown* was a "race" case rather than an "education" case—because it was geared toward rectifying the injustice of segregation rather than providing an optimal mix of students for educational purposes—desegregation orders were not designed to promote the majority middle-class environments that Coleman believed would raise achievement. Under some desegregation schemes, in fact, majority middle-class schools and overwhelmingly poor schools were integrated in a way that *reduced* the net number of schools that met Coleman's goal of a 60 percent middle-class student body. Under these conditions, Coleman noted, it was not surprising that middle-class families withdrew their children from newly desegregated, majority poor, public schools.

"The history of education since the industrial revolution," Coleman wrote, "shows a continual struggle between two forces: the desire by members of society to have educational opportunity for all children, and the desire of each family to provide the best education it can afford for its own students." So long as integration meant that more students would attend majority middle-class schools, the conflict might be elided: It was good for equal opportunity, and caused little, if any, academic harm to individual families. But the Constitution gave no heed to this sociological finding, and *Brown* did not guarantee a middle-class majority.

Many liberals saw Coleman's 1975 white-flight report as a betrayal and denounced Coleman as a racist. The president of the American Sociological Association sought to expel him as a member. (The effort was unsuccessful, and in the early 1990s, Coleman was chosen to be the association's president.) However, Coleman's opposition to busing did not mean he opposed integration efforts. Discussing his findings on busing in the *New York Times Magazine* in 1975, Coleman suggested an alternative: "I'd propose that each central-city child should have an entitlement from the state to attend any school in the metropolitan area outside his own district—with per pupil funds going with him." He further provided that suburban districts

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shouldn't be able to veto transfers; and that transfers be capped at 20 or 30 percent. Likewise, he proposed funding integrated schools at 150 percent the level of funding of non-integrated schools.

In a chapter for a 1981 book on school desegregation, Coleman reaffirmed the ideal of economically integrated schools, placing it at the center of our educational system. "American public education," in contrast to European education, was "from its beginning a single system, founded on the ideology of a single 'common school' that children of all economic levels and all groups would attend." Forced busing did not promote the common school, he argued, but policy makers should provide incentives to promote integration through magnet schools, urban-suburban school transfer programs like those found in Milwaukee, and portable funding, weighted to encourage integration in all directions. In lieu of busing, he argued for the principle "that every child has the full right and opportunity, unconstrained by residence or race or transportation costs, or by artificial school district boundaries, to attend the school of his or her choice."

Coleman had grown increasingly convinced that school district lines were a barrier to equal opportunity and saw less and less reason to allow these artificial constructs to interfere with the movement of students. In 1978, he noted that because localities paid for less than half of the education bill, "the locality basis for education is increasingly undermined, and there is an increasing rationale for state or federal control over education."

## The Catholic school effect

In the third major phase of his education research, Coleman examined the benefit of attending private schools, particularly Catholic schools—another venture that seemingly confirmed his journey toward neoconservatism. Having found that compensatory spending didn't work very well and that busing could foster white flight, Coleman now further cut his ties to progressives by concluding that private high schools did a better job of educating kids than public schools.

In 1982, Coleman and co-authors Thomas Hoffer and Sally Kilgore published *High School Achievement: Public and Pri-*

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*vate Schools*, which found that Catholic high schools were both more integrated economically and racially and produced greater achievement than public schools. Comparing children of similar backgrounds, the authors discovered that students performed about one grade level higher in Catholic schools. Low-income and minority students in particular did better in Catholic schools than in public schools. The study was enormously controversial, and it came under heavy fire from a number of sources because it measured achievement at a single point in time, rather than achievement growth over time, and thus did not fully control for self-selection bias. Sure, low-income children in Catholic schools do better than low-income students in public schools, critics charged, but might that be the case because low-income children attending Catholic schools have particularly motivated parents, who cared enough about education to plunk down their own money—a factor that cannot be controlled for by using income statistics?

Coleman and Hoffer returned to this subject in their 1987 book *Public and Private High Schools: The Impact of Communities*, which, tracking advances in student achievement over time, better addressed the question of self-selection bias. The longitudinal study found significant positive effects after controlling for income and initial achievement. Moreover, student achievement in Catholic high schools became less dependent on family background over time, in contrast to what takes place in public schools. "This suggests that the Catholic schools were functioning to diminish the effects of background," Coleman and Hoffer wrote, "so that the Catholic schools more closely approximated the 'common school' ideal of American education than did the public (or the other private) schools."

Coleman and Hoffer found that part of the reason poor children did better in Catholic schools was the peer effects that derive from the more economically advantaged backgrounds of their classmates. But they also found a residual effect, above and beyond this factor, and concluded that the approach of Catholic schools—the emphasis on high standards, better discipline, and greater parental involvement—better served the goal of raising the achievement of low-income children. Catholic school parents were almost twice as likely to have volunteered to help with fund-raising or school projects

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as public school parents (46 percent versus 27 percent), and were more likely to attend parent-teacher conferences (56 percent versus 39 percent). Catholic school students were much less likely than public school students to report that students often cut class (16 percent versus 62 percent) or often didn't obey teachers (15 percent versus 30 percent). Likewise, 72 percent of Catholic students were enrolled in an academic program (rather than a general or vocational program), compared with 36 percent in public schools.

Coleman and Hoffer also identified an additional factor that might have contributed to success in Catholic schools: the strong sense of community and shared mission, an idea that Coleman developed further in his influential writings on social capital. In a 1988 article in the *American Journal of Sociology* that became part of his monumental *Foundations of Social Theory* (1990), Coleman rejected the economist's "extreme individualistic premises" and argued for the importance of "social capital," a resource that springs from relations among people. Social capital can stem from relations within families, but Coleman also found that Catholic schools helped prevent high-school dropout in part because the "adult community surrounding the school" provided support to students.

Coleman's "conservative" message about the efficacy of private schools was combined with a "progressive" conclusion: social institutions matter. While the Coleman Report emphasized the importance of socioeconomic background, Coleman's new reasearch demonstrated that institutions like Catholic schools can make an important difference. Coleman attempted to reconcile the two findings by noting that in the mid 1960s and the mid 1980s, there was a significant weakening of the influence of family relative to peers and other institutions as the number of single parents and working mothers soared.

## Beyond left and right

What does all this say about current education debates? Today, most centrist educators and policy makers have embraced the movement for higher and more uniform academic standards, resisting concerns on the left about disparate impact on minorities and on the right about the specter of federal takeover. The key battle remains one between a liberal

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emphasis on greater spending and a conservative emphasis on private school vouchers.

Progressives are generally far more sophisticated about their advocacy of education spending today than in the past, emphasizing specific programs like class-size reduction that many studies have shown to be effective. Yet calls for general increases in education spending remain a key part of progressive rhetoric, even as studies reporting the inefficacy of the federal Title I compensatory spending program continue to pile up. In one of his last acts as president, Bill Clinton issued Executive Order 13190, which created a new Presidential Commission on Educational Resource Equity. Announced on Martin Luther King Day as part of Clinton's effort to help promote "One America," the 13-member panel was designed to address "long standing gaps in access to educational resources," particularly "disparities based on race and ethnicity." A striking example of policy amnesia, the executive order pretends that the research that culminated in the Coleman Report—and subsequent confirmations of its findings—were never conducted. The focus on spending disparities by race seems particularly misplaced given the findings, cited in Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips's 1998 book on *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, that "the average black child and the average white child now live in school districts that spend almost exactly the same amount per pupil"—$5,387 for blacks, $5,397 for whites.

The leading idea among conservatives is to provide public funds for private school vouchers, either as a targeted benefit for low-income children and children attending failing schools, or as a universal entitlement. Coleman's research on the effectiveness of Catholic schools might seem to support a broad expansion of private school voucher programs. If Catholic schools do provide a "common school" environment and good academic results, then why not give more kids trapped in bad schools the chance to attend Catholic schools?

The problem is the classic one of going to scale. As long as Catholic schools are wholly private, they have the prerogative to reject the applications of students who they think will not meet academic standards. They can reject students who have a history of misbehaving (or expel those they've admitted who

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prove troublesome), and they can feel confident that parents who are willing to reach into their own pockets to finance at least part of their children's education are likely to be fairly active in the school. Some 70 percent of Catholic high schools require tests for admission, and the typical Catholic high school rejects 12 percent of applicants—not Andover standards, but not open admissions either. Also, many social scientists point out that even in areas where Catholic schools educate large numbers of poor children, the self-selected families that apply (and often pay some tuition) will more closely approximate middle-class public school families in values and culture.

Where publicly funded voucher programs are small, Catholic schools retain a competitive advantage over public schools serving similar demographic groups because it is a more motivated group that applies. Those small number of students who get in often do better than similarly motivated control groups who lose out in the lottery, but this result is unsurprising because the peers and parents in Catholic schools are still likely to be more motivated than peers and parents in public schools. More to the point, the small size of the program creates a potential problem: The much larger number of students in public schools who are left behind may be worse off because they are now surrounded by an even higher concentration of the least motivated peers and the least active parents.

A robust and widespread voucher program, in which failing public schools were closed down, and in which the vast majority of low-income students took advantage of vouchers, would address the "creaming" issue but also create a new set of problems. If, through widespread use of vouchers, low-income Catholic schools suddenly began taking very large numbers of low-income students by lottery, without screening them, and if, in order to qualify for public funding, parochial schools lost the ability to expel students who misbehave or fall behind academically, then these schools would likely come to resemble high-poverty public schools that are required to take all comers.

Of course, there are some nonselective, high-poverty public schools that, through the heroic work of dedicated principals, teachers, parents, and students, perform at high levels. The

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Heritage Foundation recently issued a report in which the author "found not one or two [but] twenty-one high-poverty high performing schools." But these 21 schools stand in contrast with the 7,000 schools nationally that the Department of Education identifies as high-poverty and low-performing. The odds do not favor these schools, and it would be unwise to develop an education policy that depends upon heroic efforts.

## Recreating the common school

So is it possible, on a national scale, to create schools that resemble Catholic schools in their high expectations, active parental involvement, and well-disciplined children? Well, one thing that American education has always done fairly well on a national scale is to provide a good education in majority middle-class schools. Viewed from this perspective, the Coleman Report of 1966 and Coleman's subsequent research on private schools are mutually reinforcing: Culture trumps expenditure. If it is true that Catholic schools approximate the culture found in middle-class public schools but are limited in number, why not instead give every student the chance to attend a middle-class public school?

This is just what school officials in La Crosse, Wisconsin, decided to do for their students in the early 1990s. Rather than desegregating schools by race, officials adopted the goal of a student population in each public school that is between 15 and 45 percent eligible for free lunch. This economic balance was implemented primarily by redrawing district lines and transporting students, rather than by parental choice.

The La Crosse experiment inspires a question: Why not marry the effort to promote economically integrated common schools with Coleman's support for greater public school choice? Schools in a given geographic area can take on special signatures (an emphasis on computers or on the arts, for example), in recognition that different children have different needs. Parents can have the chance to rank their preferences, and school officials can honor these choices in a way that also prevents isolation of students by economic class. To be sure, unregulated school choice might exacerbate economic segregation. But various steps could be taken, such as locating schools that appeal to the middle class in blue-collar neighborhoods,

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to harness choice to promote integration. Majority middle-class schools will make it much easier to achieve the first three ingredients of Catholic school success—high standards, active parental involvement, and good discipline. The use of public school choice can add the fourth ingredient: the sense of community that comes from a shared mission and set of goals. This notion of a community based not on race or income or geography but rather on shared ideas is fundamental to the American experiment.

While the policy debate in Washington still centers on vouchers and spending and other attempts to make "separate but equal" work better, a few communities are beginning to take up Coleman's emphasis on school integration over school spending; integration by class over integration by race; and public school choice over forced busing. In the Wake County, North Carolina, school district, which includes the city of Raleigh and surrounding suburbs, school officials recently replaced a racial integration plan with one that emphasizes economic status. The county set a goal that no more than 40 percent of students in any particular school should be eligible for free or reduced price lunch, and no more than 25 percent should read below grade level.

This new emphasis on integration by economic status also answers the objection to racial integration voiced by Justice Clarence Thomas in a 1995 desegregation case. "It never ceases to amaze me that the courts are so willing to assume that anything that is predominantly black must be inferior," he wrote. Plans like those in La Crosse and Wake County recognize that there is nothing magical about sitting next to kids with white skin and that establishing a solidly middle-class culture in all schools is the best hope for student success.

The debate over vouchers is likely to yield a compromise that provides for greater public school choice. Conservatives know that voucher ballot initiatives took a thumping in California and Michigan during the 2000 election, and progressives know that they must respond with something more immediate than the promise to improve public schools over a generation. Perhaps both sides can accept two premises advanced by voucher proponents—that it is unfair to trap poor kids in bad schools, and that it is good to provide more choice and com-

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petition—but then apply these principles to public schools.

Coleman's research led the way toward this synthesis by uncovering the socioeconomic ingredients needed for successful public schools and by demonstrating that many private schools better approached the middle-class culture of the common school than high-poverty public schools themselves. The idea of recreating the American common school through public school choice is thoroughly American, and it is also quintessentially Colemanesque.

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# The problem of reading in an age of mass democracy

MARTIN DIAMOND

I AM not so audacious as to tell people like yourselves, who are directly engaged in the problems of schooling the young, how to proceed in specific and practical terms. I merely dare to suggest that I can tell you something about the principles upon which your enterprise rests or should rest.

On the question of reading in an age of mass democracy, let me begin with two statements that lead directly to the problem and to my argument. The principle of democracy is equality. The deepest principle of human existence is inequality. Hence problems. All the problems of American life in

*This is the second of an occasional series of "readings"—reprints of articles, essays, and lectures that we believe are as pertinent today, if not more so, as when they first appeared. The late Martin Diamond delivered this talk, first published in 1970, before a group of teachers at the Claremont Reading Conference. It is included in a compilation of his essays,* As Far As Republican Principles Will Admit *(Washington, D.C.: AEI Press, 1992), and is reprinted here by permission of the American Enterprise Institute.*



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some profound way are affected by the tension between the egalitarian intention and thrust of our fundamental political institutions, and the inescapable inegalitarianism of the human condition on this planet. That tension affects or forms or shapes all our problems in some sense. Accordingly, it must and does affect the problem of reading and of education in a democratic society.

Because it is deeply a part of human existence, the principle of which is inequality, the principle of education and hence of reading is likewise inequality. I deliberately choose to set myself in opposition to the present egalitarian thrust of our educational enterprise. Not to smooth ruffled feathers, but simply to set things out clearly, let me add that I am *not* challenging the idea of a decent educational minimum for all, nor the idea of equal educational opportunity, nor the idea of remedial education for the handicapped, the deficient, or the underprivileged. All of these ideas can be justified, but their justification must rest upon and be compatible with an understanding of the educational enterprise. Let me state that understanding in a paraphrase of a Marxist idea. As in the Marxist doctrine of communism which does not anywhere exist, so it is in education which everywhere exists: From each according to his ability—and now comes the modification of the Marxist formula—*to each according to his ability*. Not to each according to his need (in the sense of desires), but to each according to his ability. And since ability is distributed among humans unequally, then education must be distributed unequally. That is, those capable of it must receive more, or deeper, or higher education than those less capable.

## Tocqueville's political science

The tension between democratic equality and natural human inequality—that is the framework of this talk. More specifically, what are the problems that derive from the fundamental tension between the natural inegalitarianism of education and the egalitarianism (especially as nowadays construed) of democracy? Let me supply for a few moments a broad framework for consideration of these problems. This means that I introduce you to the author upon whom I rely for this talk. You ought to be able to guess from my title that I mean

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Tocqueville, the great French analyst of democracy. (His *Democracy in America* is by far the profoundest account of American life ever written by a foreigner, or by an American, with the possible exception of *The Federalist*. These two works together compose the classic library on the American experience, in my view.) From a brief consideration of Tocqueville, I will be able to move to the specific problems of literature, reading, and education in a mass democratic society.

Tocqueville's general analysis is as follows. For millennia—since the dawn of time—the fundamental sociopolitical principle of all societies (even those like Athens which called themselves democracies) was inequality. Hierarchy, station, estates, statuses—all these are terms that we use in trying to describe the vertical or hierarchical society. All societies rested upon the principle of the fundamental human inequality and structured that inequality into their social and political arrangements. There is no pretty aristocrat in Tocqueville; he examines all the consequences of inequality. Thus he emphasizes that wretchedness, misery, and degradation were typically the lot of the great bulk of mankind. We in a democratic age can take immense pride, Tocqueville tells us, in the improvements we have made in the relief of man's estate, in the alleviation of that misery which for millennia characterized the human condition. Democracy is a superb effort—decent democracy, that is—a superb effort to overcome that ancient and traditional acceptance of misery for the many and cultivation for the few.

Then Tocqueville sketches the consequences of inequality. He shows all sorts of consequences—in family structure, paternal authority, patterns of religion, of art, of all the human activities. He gives a remarkable sketch of the way in which inegalitarianism tilted, skewed, gave a twist to all human institutions and enterprises for thousands of years. But Tocqueville warns that all this is now over. The age of inequality is being replaced by the age of equality. This is, he says in effect, a change as profound as the change from the time before the Flood to after the Flood, from before revelation to after revelation. His book is dedicated to anticipating all the ways that the new principle of equality will shape human existence. Above all, he emphasizes that the new age of democracy will pro-

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duce two profound dangers for mankind—a new and worse kind of tyranny than ever known, and the empire of mediocrity. I will deal briefly with the new tyranny, but will then turn to the problem of mediocrity, which will return us to the problem of education and reading in the democratic age.

## Democratic mediocrity

In the age of equality, Tocqueville says, men will be more susceptible to tyranny and to a more complete tyranny than ever before. Why? In the age of inequality, all of society looked like this: stations and statuses were closely linked. The lowest man had the man he owed his fealty to, who owed it to someone else, who owed it....; throughout the chain, obligations above and responsibilities below—a chain of hierarchical being. The reason that liberty is peculiarly imperiled in the age of equality is that democracy takes this vast chain of closely linked people and lays it out flat, in a vast level plain of equal and equally powerless individuals over whom may readily and irreversibly be fastened the tyranny of one man or of public opinion itself. A simple example will be illustrative. What is it that democracy lacks that, say, the Middle Ages had? Answer: moats. Moats were a great device for the preservation of liberty against tyrannical threats from, say, Prince John. (Think how much movies in that era depend upon moats for their dramatic action!) Protected by the moat, gathered within a fortress, localities composed of closely allied social classes were enabled to defend themselves against centralized tyranny. Democracy today has no such natural barriers to tyranny.

Our concern today, however, is not with Tocqueville's prescient account of democratic despotism, but with the problem of democratic mediocrity. This problem of mediocrity is connected with the problem of despotism; not the despotism of Stalin or Hitler, which incidentally Tocqueville might well have called democratic despotism because their particular virulence, their "totalitarianism," was possible only in the age of mass democracy. Rather, mediocrity is connected with a new "soft despotism," the despotism of public opinion, the despotism of "all over each," to invent a Hobbesian phrase to describe it.

The logic of the soft despotism is this. We are all equals;

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hence, more equals are wiser, better, juster, or whatever than fewer of those equals; that is, majority rule. Since the only thing that distinguishes human beings from one another is their quantity, public opinion becomes an irresistible force. Public opinion had nothing like the force it now has in aristocratic ages. The Duke of Omnium was perfectly capable of thumbing his nose at public opinion and going his own irascible way; we all enjoy this in the English comedies we see on the late-late television movies. We enjoy it as a vestige of that earlier, eccentric age in which aristocratic individuals easily went their own way. That privileged eccentricity is overwhelmed in the democratic age. The new soft despotism derives from the idea to which equality dangerously tends, in which individuality collapses before the weight of public opinion on the ground, Who am I, or we, this minority, this handful, to say nay to the many?

Let me emphasize as we consider Tocqueville on mediocrity what was emphasized as we considered his view of despotism. He is no snobbish aristocrat looking down his nose at democracy. He is a dispassionate observer who understands aristocratic wickedness and oppression; he sees the degradation and bestiality which everywhere so long endured. Indeed, he is a friend of democracy, he tells us, for its great potential. He is a friend, however, who can speak the truth. He warns us of the problem in the democratic age of egalitarian leveling. One aspect of this leveling, Tocqueville warns, will appear in the kind of literature that the democratic age produces. In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville discusses the small guild of artists in aristocratic ages, the small audience, the nobility, the court, and the kind of art and literature that were then admired. It was baroque, highly stylized, a highly disciplined form. Craft and technique and subtlety were important in that art. Its defect was to fall over into a barren formalism, mere craft, mere technique. Against that, what are the characteristics of literature in democratic ages?

> In democracies it is by no means the case that all who cultivate literature have received a literary education; and most of those who have a tinge of belles-lettres are engaged either in politics or in a profession that only allows them to taste occasionally and by stealth the pleasure of the mind. These pleasures, therefore,

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> do not constitute the principal charm of their lives, but they are considered as a transient and necessary recreation amid the serious labors of life. Such men ... prefer books which may be easily procured, quickly read, and which require no learned researches to be easily understood. They ask for beauties self-proffered and easily enjoyed; above all, they must have what is unexpected and new. Accustomed to the struggle, the crosses, and the monotony of practical life, they require strong and rapid emotions, startling passages, truths or errors brilliant enough to rouse them up and to plunge them at once, as if by violence, into the midst of the subject.

Understand that no book like that existed when he wrote this. He said that this is what American books will be like when Americans get around to writing books; and it is a remarkably accurate picture of what our literature came to be.

> Form ... will ordinarily be slighted, sometimes despised. Style will frequently be fantastic, incorrect, overburdened, and loose, almost always vehement and bold. Authors will aim at rapidity of execution more than at perfection of detail. Small productions will be more common than bulky books [I'm not sure about that prediction]; there will be more wit than erudition, more imagination than profundity; and literary performances will bear marks of an untutored and rude vigor of thought, frequently of great variety and singular fecundity. The object of authors will be to astonish rather than to please, and to stir the passions more than to charm the taste.

Democratic literature, Tocqueville says, will take its bearings from the mass audience, an audience busy 40 hours a week, and wanting kicks on the weekend. It will be an audience bored stiff with the monotony of making a comfortable living, and wanting quick satisfactions at night. This audience will want the *Reader's Digest* version of literature: six best-sellers all in one boiled-down, packaged edition, remaindered later for 10 cents at Goodwill and the Salvation Army. It will want books that immediately arouse the attention, and it will want, above all else, ease—the deepest yearning of democratic life. Tocqueville says somewhere that the American, like all people in the democratic age, will be filled with ambition, lively, and at the same time indolent. Ambitious indolence seeking easy gratification, in literature as in all other things; that is Tocqueville's analysis of our nature. It is a profound

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analysis, of which I give but the barest clues here. You will have to read and reread Tocqueville, carefully, deeply, thoughtfully in order to understand him. In short, you will have to grant Tocqueville the favor that Tocqueville's teacher asked for himself. In the preface to *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu writes:

> I beg one favor of my readers, which I fear will not be granted me; this is, that they will not judge by a few hours' reading of the labor of twenty years.... If they would search into the design of the author, they can do it in no other way so completely as by searching into the design of the work.

No ease is here, no easy engorging of ideas. Only those with the capacity to understand and only those willing to put in the hard labor of understanding can read men like Tocqueville and Montesquieu and be educated by them. Those without the capacity or unwilling to labor cannot be educated by them. That is the long and short of it; that is the inherent and ineradicable inegalitarianism of education.

## Utopian expectations

Let me sum up and state somewhat differently my discussion to this point. There is a tension between a regime that says equality, and enterprises like education, which reflect the imperatives of human inequality. We can live with that tension when equality is properly understood, as equality is understood in the Declaration of Independence and in the American regime under the Constitution. But the tension has been worsened; the problem has become acute because of a new and improper understanding of equality. The principle of equality, more and more people have come to believe, means that each person is equally entitled to live a fully human life. Not, mind you, to try to do so, to have equal opportunity with others, to be equally free of the rule of others; not equally free to pursue happiness, but to have it, to live a fully human life. That is the new claim of democracy. But this runs head on into that inequality which I have claimed to be the deepest principle of human existence. Very few are complete human beings; most of us are very far from it indeed. Is that not your own experience, as to yourselves and those around you?

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Is there not something misleadingly utopian in a determination that all shall be equally fully human?

Consider the parentage of the idea and the phrase. What was Marx's promise to mankind? That history was leading us, that the revolutionary proletariat would propel us into the—I think he says—the realm of freedom, from out of the kingdom of necessity. And then he promises that we will all live the fully human life. That was the catchphrase of nineteenth-century utopianism. That utopian expectation increasingly has become the standard against which men measure their happiness; and the result is despair and malaise. By that misleading expectation, democracy is made to promise everybody that he will have all the pleasures of the body, spirit, and mind that belong to the complete human being. And life—mockingly, eternally—teaches that this is simply not possible. It teaches that the complete human life is achieved only by some and by a hard, torturous ascent. Properly understood, democracy promises only that there will be no artificial barriers to everyone's opportunity; that no man must be kept from fulfilling his capacity because of his origin. That is the first aspiration of democracy. But now we try to go beyond that. We say we are going to make everyone not only equally free, but equally, fully human. And since it simply cannot be done, we invent delusive shortcuts and deceive ourselves that we are accomplishing our objective.

One early example of how we try to overcome the natural barriers to complete equality was Woolworth's, the five-and-ten-cent store. Tiffany's sold real diamonds. There weren't enough to go around, so we manufactured paste gems, and mass marketed them in the five and dime. Unfortunately, paste gems do not gratify egalitarian yearnings for long; remarkable as it was, the five-and-ten-cent store did not overcome natural inequality. Interestingly, Tocqueville had seized upon something similar as an example of what would happen. There are natural diamonds, he said, which the many covet and the few possess. Artificial diamonds will then be made; but when they become sufficiently abundant, no one will want them and they will become again what they always really were, mere pebbles in a stream. Neither successful nor unsuccessful imitation, it seems, can overcome inequality.

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In what other ways do we give ourselves the illusion of achieving equally the fully human life? I offer one, LSD. It is the perfect union of egalitarianism and technology. The least human creature can, merely by virtue of a chemical effect, see more beautiful things than could Plato or Shakespeare. Is that not the perfect conquest of natural inequality? But nature is not so easily to be conquered, as the victims of LSD know, and as those know who have tried it and discovered that their lives are as dreary as ever after they return from their "trips." There are dozens of other means by which we try to render human fullness available on the cheap for everybody. But the examples I have given will have to suffice; you can think out the others for yourselves.

## A Jeffersonian solution

We must return to an understanding of equality which does not collide ludicrously with the reality of inequality, and which therefore will not necessitate the search for shortcuts to the full life, to place it within the grasp of all and without the pain of striving. In short, how can we be faithful to a democratic mandate for equality and at the same time accommodate the inescapable claims of human inequality? That is the fundamental question. The question points to an understanding of democracy in which the egalitarian thrust of our political institutions can be made compatible with the kind of inequality that I have claimed inheres in the very nature of education. Fortunately, there is a good American parentage for such an understanding of democracy. Thomas Jefferson approached the problem of education in much the spirit I am recommending today. In his 200-page letter to a French correspondent, which became in fact a book entitled *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson proposed a public school system that would supply a basic education to all children through the sixth grade. But then only the one best student out of every ten would go on to eighth grade, and then one of ten would go through high school; and finally about one out of every original 200 students would wind up in college. His scheme was designed, he said, "annually to rake the genius out of the rubbish." Now Jefferson did not mean that the sons and daughters of his favored yeomanry were in fact rubbish.

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The harshness of the term, however, serves to make clear how fully he accepted that the few, the natural *aristoi*, had immensely superior faculties; and his educational system was devised to give to those superior few the greater quantity and depth of education which was their due. (As I said earlier: "to each according to his ability.") Moreover, Jefferson was convinced that his scheme was fully democratic. The superior few are chosen democratically, by merit and not by birth or wealth. Democracy properly understood, Jefferson claimed, is the best way to accommodate the human inequalities because it is the best way to allow the naturally superior to rise to the top.

Whether he was right or wrong, that was the American tradition. It was a tradition of what I like to call "anybody democracy"; that is, a system which is democratic, not because it denies the superiority of some, but because it recognizes and nurtures that superiority in anybody, regardless of all artificial distinctions of class, social origin, wealth, status, religion, etc. This "anybody democracy" of our tradition, which was at least sympathetic to excellence, is being replaced with "everybody democracy," which is not; that is, a democracy which ignores natural distinctions, indeed despises them; a democracy which seeks means to overcome natural inequality and to replace it with a rigid egalitarianism.

## Leading forth excellence

I turn now to the final portion of my observations. The Latin root of the word education demonstrates further the intrinsic inegalitarianism of education. *Educere*. (The roots and primitive meanings of words, by the way, are fine educational tools. To show a student what the human mind had in mind when it first invented a word to describe a phenomenon is to reenact the primeval encounter of mind with the thing or idea; and then it is fascinating to show the changes over time in the meaning and use of the word.) Education has come to represent the idea of pouring things into the student. This pouring in or stuffing the student lends itself to the idea of educational equality. If education consists in things to be poured in, then we can slice it or dish it up in equal doses; it is easier to think of all students as equal if what we have to do is to fill them with things.

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But the literal meaning of *educere* will remind us that education is very different from stuffing the student. On the contrary, it means to *lead forth*. To lead forth, that is what we are doing when we are educating. When we remember what *educere* meant originally, we understand anew why the metaphor for education so often is the midwife; that is, to lead forth in a quite literal sense. Compare, by the way, Socrates, who was the midwife of the mind, with Marx, who meant to be the midwife of history; that is one way to see the profound change which has been made from ancient thought. Now this idea of education as leading forth rather than as cramming in is quite popular these days. It is fashionable to make much about the discussion method, and about giving the child a share in his education, and about how bad it is to fill their heads with dry facts. But perhaps we can extract some serious and not so popular implications from the currently popular idea of education as leading forth.

First and foremost, the human stuff to be led forth is unequal. Some have much to be drawn out of them, some little. *Educere* implies inequality; that must not be blinked aside. And we all know this from our day-to-day experiences in the classroom. And let me add that this inequality, which the idea of leading forth forces upon our attention, is not merely a matter of privilege or underprivilege, or merely a matter of cultural differences. Inequality knows no racial or ethnic or religious lines; it is a splendidly random thing. Incidentally, it is that randomness which makes life tolerable. If inequality were familial or racial or ethnic, we would all long since be living under aristocracy or despotism or colonialism. No one could argue for democracy if there were permanent bloodlines, racial or familial, with respect to inequality. But nature is democratically random. The greatest royalty can produce an imbecile; and the dreariest peasants can produce a great contribution to mankind.

The first implication of *educere* is that there is unequal human stuff to be led forth. The second is: What is to be led forth? I'll tell you how Aristotle and Aquinas answered: The aspirations and capacities for the human good are by nature implanted (but unequally) in each breast, and that natural good is what we should be leading forth. But this would get

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us into a long discussion of modern social science, relativism, positivism—is there such a thing as the good, who is to say, etc. I leave all that aside, but I point out to you that, unless what is in each is good, why should we want to bring it out? Do we not necessarily imply that what is there is good by the very fact that we want to bring it out? Could anyone seriously argue for leading forth the bad? By the very word education and by our actions we presuppose the Aristotelian or Thomistic—or one variation or another of them—ideas of the natural law impressed upon the human heart.

## Everests of the mind

To educate, therefore, is to educe, and that means to lead forth from the superior few the richness that is within them, and from the many to lead forth the lesser excellence that is in them. We must recognize and cultivate the superior student wherever he is to be found, of whatever race, class, of whatever ethnic or social origin. That is what democracy rightly demands of us. But we must not allow democracy to become a dogmatic egalitarianism that does not welcome eagerly the naturally superior, whom Jefferson's system sought out. That dogmatic egalitarianism is dangerously popular in an age of mass democracy. We have got openly and unabashedly to resist it. That means to teach students that thoughtful reading is a profoundly difficult job, that there are no reading shortcuts to grasping the great writers. We must teach the young that there are men who came before them who attained almost unimaginable heights, and whose works are like Everests of the mind, to be ascended by the gifted and determined few. At first there is something hateful in this to many of the young; it is disagreeable to be made to see that there were giants who preceded you, whom you must approach with care and respect. But the student can learn to love the fact that genius is the fruit of human inequality, that the past is as wise as the present, and that a great step toward becoming fully human is to lift yourself up by careful and thoughtful reading of truly demanding works. Those who teach reading in this age of mass democracy have the obligation and opportunity to instill that love of superior things.

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# The medicalization of unhappiness

RONALD W. DWORKIN

THE use of psychotropic medication in depressed patients has increased in the United States by more than 40 percent over the last decade, from 32 million office visits resulting in a drug prescription to over 45 million. This is in marked contrast to the period between 1978 and 1987, when the number of office visits resulting in a psychotropic drug prescription remained relatively stable. The bulk of the increase can be accounted for by the aggressive use of SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) in patients. It is the class of drugs that includes Prozac, Zoloft, and Paxil. The question is: Are more Americans clinically depressed now than in the past, or has medical science started to treat the far more common experience of "everyday unhappiness" with medication, thereby increasing the number of drug prescriptions?

No one knows the answer to this question. We do know that the number of patients diagnosed with depression has doubled over the last 30 years, without any great change in



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diagnostic criteria. But this simply raises another question: Are doctors more aggressive in diagnosing depression, or are they simply diagnosing "everyday unhappiness" as a variant of depression and reporting it as such?

These questions are at the center of a major debate within the medical community over who the new patients being treated with antidepressants are and what treatment guidelines are being used. There is suspicion among some doctors that it is not the sickest patients who are being given psychotropic drugs but those patients who complain the loudest about being unhappy. Some physicians blame managed care for the problem of over-prescription. Because the office environment under managed care is so rushed and impersonal, many doctors take the path of least resistance by prescribing medication whenever a patient is feeling "blue." Also, managed-care companies save money when depressed patients receive medication rather than an indefinite number of counseling sessions.

This suspicion is well founded, but the origin of the problem does not lie solely in managed care. The sources of over-prescription are much more complex. Physicians are being encouraged to think about everyday unhappiness in ways that make them more likely to treat it with psychotropic medication. It is part of a growing phenomenon in our society: the medicalization of unhappiness.

In the past, medical science cared for the mentally ill, while everyday unhappiness was left to religious, spiritual, or other cultural guides. Now, medical science is moving beyond its traditional border to help people who are bored, sad, or experiencing low self-esteem—in other words, people who are suffering from nothing more than life.

This trend first became widely known with the publication in 1992 of *Listening to Prozac*. Peter Kramer's book, which became a national best-seller, described the positive benefits enjoyed by depressed patients when they were put on Prozac. The drug apparently increased self-esteem and reduced negative feelings when nothing else could. The book led many in the medical community and the broader public to look more favorably on a liberal use of antidepressants.

Medical science should aggressively use drugs like Prozac for patients suffering from clinical depression. This is totally

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appropriate—and important. But medical science errs when it supposes that a connection exists between everyday unhappiness and clinical depression, something it increasingly does. It is hard to know where everyday unhappiness ends and clinical depression begins, and there is no easy way to distinguish between borderline depression (i.e., low spirits without any physical signs or symptoms) and everyday unhappiness. Traditionally, doctors have relied on their wisdom, intuition, and personal experience to separate the two. Such a method is neither precise nor foolproof, but it is possibly the best we can aspire to. The problem is that medical science has placed everyday unhappiness and depression on a single continuum, thereby interfering with the efforts of doctors to make fine but necessary distinctions.

Medical science has adopted a method of classifying mental disorders that blurs the line between sickness and health. And more radically, it has embraced a theory that explains all mental states in terms of their biochemical origins. Medical science has done this in order to make the problem of unhappiness simpler and more comprehensible to doctors. But the new science actually works against the efforts of doctors to separate everyday unhappiness from depression. The upshot is that physicians are more likely to treat mere unhappiness the way they would treat serious mental illness—with psychotropic drugs.

## Categories of unhappiness

One way that science establishes a link between clinical depression and everyday unhappiness is through a diagnostic instrument called the DSM. First published in 1952 and now in its fifth edition, the DSM (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*) is the essential diagnostic tool in the psychiatric field. It is a classification scheme for the entire range of human mental pathology. The DSM includes 16 major diagnostic classes (e.g., mood disorders, anxiety disorders, substance-abuse disorders), and these categories are divided up again and again in accordance with certain signs and symptoms. The DSM was originally developed by psychiatrists and psychologists, but even primary-care physicians refer to its nomenclature and categories in determining whether or not a

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patient has a significant mental illness.

The original purpose of the DSM was to satisfy the psychiatric profession's need for statistical and epidemiological data. But by establishing a relationship between clinical depression and everyday unhappiness when no such relationship existed before, the DSM has led inexorably to a liberal use of psychotropic medication.

Prior to the development of the DSM, feelings of unhappiness were not considered related to any of the authentic disease states that existed in medical science, such as depression or schizophrenia. While clinical depression had an official status in medical science, everyday sadness did not. The DSM changed this by creating large categories of mental illness and then ever-increasing subcategories, replete with subtypes and specifiers. "Major depression," for example, was broken down into a host of subtypes, including "minor depression," which was broken down further into symptoms of everyday unhappiness like pessimism, hopelessness, and despair. With the creation of the DSM, everyday unhappiness suddenly gained a fixed position in medical science, if only as a subcategory of a subcategory of a major mental illness.

The DSM incorporates everyday unhappiness into medicine in another way. It encourages doctors to use its multiaxial system, which allows the mental state of a patient to be assessed in different ways. For example, Axis I is used for reporting any major mental disorders. Axis III is used for reporting a patient's general medical condition. Axis IV is used for assessing a person's psychosocial and environmental problems. It is within Axis IV that everyday unhappiness takes a position within medical science. For example, one can find on Axis IV job dissatisfaction, discord with one's boss, or trouble with one's spouse. Such everyday troubles are given their own special diagnostic code in a companion book called the *ICD-9 (International Classification of Diseases)*. Trouble with one's spouse, for example, is listed as Partner Relational Problem, and is assigned number V61.1. Through the use of this multiaxial system, everyday unhappiness is brought into the orbit of medical science.

By itself, this does not lead to an increased reliance on psychotropic medication. The problem arises because the cat-

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egories of mental illness in the DSM are so porous as to allow everyday unhappiness to pass into the category of a more significant disease. The diagnosis of "minor depression," for example, requires only a feeling of sadness and a loss of pleasure in daily activities—a mood that may characterize the pain of everyday life as well as any medical pathology. Because "minor depression" often gets treated with medication, so too does everyday unhappiness.

"Adjustment disorder with depressed mood" is another DSM category that has the potential to be confused with everyday emotional trouble. Included in this diagnostic group would be the person who is sad and tearful because of some painful event, like the termination of a romantic relationship or a sudden business difficulty. Distinguishing an adjustment disorder from the despondency that people might feel during one of life's routine downturns can be very difficult. Because adjustment disorders are often treated with medication, everyday unhappiness is too.

Another catch-all category is "Depressive Disorder NOS (Not Otherwise Specified)." An example of a patient with "Depressive Disorder NOS" was described to me by a psychiatrist as someone who says, "Doctor, I'm feeling sad and my sleep is restless. I don't know if I'm depressed or getting depressed, but I'm feeling down. My appetite is fine and I've got plenty of energy, but I'm unhappy." Such a patient may be a candidate for antidepressants.

Doctors have long recognized this deficiency of the DSM, but it was not a serious problem in 1952 when it was created. Psychotropic medications were not as readily available as they are now, so doctors could not use drugs to treat everyday unhappiness even if they had wanted to. With the development of psychotropic medications, doctors now can. The combination of safe, effective drugs like Prozac and a relatively imprecise method of categorizing mental pathology results in a wide use of psychotropic medication in borderline cases of depression.

Many psychiatrists argue that over-prescription is largely the fault of primary-care physicians, who provide the majority of mental-health care in this country. In the view of the psychiatrists, primary-care physicians are not sufficiently well

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versed in the nuances of the DSM to use it properly. In one study, over 30 percent of the family practitioners interviewed confessed to needing further training to treat emotional disorders, even though it was part of their routine practice to do so. But even though mental-health professionals are more experienced in treating depression, patients do not want to be referred to a psychiatrist or therapist for fear of the stigma attached—the fear of being thought "crazy." For this reason, they insist on being treated in the primary-care setting, where expertise in managing mental illness is not great. Again, the result is an increased use of psychotropic medication in cases of everyday emotional trouble.

## The "laws" of sadness

While the potential for diagnostic error may cause some doctors to think twice about aggressively writing drug prescriptions, a new medical theory actually justifies the liberal use of psychotropic drugs. Doctors now point to a biochemical mechanism that comes close to uniting serious mental pathology and everyday emotional trouble under a single principle. It is called the "biogenic amine theory."

According to this theory, blocking the reuptake of serotonin or other neurotransmitters in the brain has a positive effect on the human psyche. Chemical compounds like serotonin, dopamine, noradrenalin, and acetylcholine are the means of communication across nerves. Since many of the drugs used to treat depression increase the amount of these neurotransmitters available in nerve spaces (called synapses), it is reasoned that depression might be caused by a deficiency of amines at the level of the nerve junction.

The biogenic amine theory has been in existence for several decades. It was developed through a series of inferences after the first generation of antidepressants, called tricyclics, was created. Because these drugs brought about an improvement in mood, and because they had a specific effect on the amines in nerve terminals, researchers concluded that amines must regulate mood.

While Kramer's *Listening to Prozac* examined the effects of Prozac on patients who were clinically ill, new research focuses on the effects of Prozac and other SSRIs on everyday

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unhappiness. According to medical science, the normal spectrum of individual differences in mood and social behavior may be tied to the same mechanism of neurotransmission that governs real mental pathology. One study postulates that different components of the human personality may have their own neurochemical substrates. These unique substrates, such as dopamine and serotonin—the same substrates involved in the biochemistry of clinical depression—may modulate the expression of everyday happiness and sadness.

Physicians have this theory in the back of their minds when they see depressed patients. They admit that depression may have many causes, but they still insist that moods are ultimately determined at the neuronal junctions of the brain where antidepressants work. In their view, all unhappiness necessarily leads back to these junctions in the same way that all roads once led to Rome.

This mindset prepares the way for a broad use of antidepressants. Because the DSM is a relatively arbitrary classification scheme, physicians think that even though their depressed patients may not fit the necessary diagnostic criteria for depression, they "almost do." And because the criteria for depression change with virtually every new edition of the DSM, being slightly off should not prevent a patient from receiving drug treatment, especially since his unhappiness, whatever its cause or level of intensity, will find its way back to the neuronal junctions of the brain as readily as all forms of depression.

Patients think in a similar vein. They understand that the classification scheme by which physicians measure the intensity of depression is arbitrary, and that the difference between a DSM-sanctioned depression and a more mild depression is not at all like the difference between being pregnant and not being pregnant. One cannot be a "little pregnant," but one can be a little depressed. In the minds of patients, the various shades of depression merge into a single unity that expresses itself eventually at the brain's neuronal junctions.

The proven value of psychoactive drugs in treating a wide spectrum of depressed patients encourages people who are just unhappy to ask for them. It seems unfair that patients who fit the DSM criteria for depression get to enjoy the quick benefits of drug treatment while those who do not are forced

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to endure the long, often painful process of talk therapy—a process that seems obscure and confusing and, to some, a bit dubious. Thus symptoms of depression are increasingly treated according to their level of intensity rather than according to their specific cause, which is unknown anyhow.

## Is this happiness?

The neuronal junctions of the brain where psychotropic drugs exert their effect are looked upon by medical science as a kind of corridor between matter and mood. Here at the subcellular level, the mystery of the human mood is believed to play itself out. A quantum of neurotransmitters is released at the neuronal junctions and a person's mood either rises or flags. The feeling of happiness gains an absolute unit of measurement in medical science and becomes, for all practical purposes, a visible phenomenon.

The flaw in this theory can be understood in the following way: Matter and mood are two different phenomena, as different as light and air, and so can have no physical interface. Just as light and air cannot affect one another, since there is no place in the universe where they "meet," neither can matter and mood affect one another, since there is no place in the physical world where they meet. One is finite, the other is infinite; the two are composed of different substances and so can never be joined together in physical reality.

It is true that neuronal junctions exist in the brain and that complex changes occur within these junctions during mental activity. But this does not necessarily make them a place where matter and mood share a common boundary. To say that they do is like watching a person get into a car, then seconds later watching the car move, and from this observation making the deduction that the car moves because someone gets into it. It is a false science to infer from the study of matter a knowledge any deeper than that of knowing the forms of matter and their relationships. It is a false science to say that on the basis of material knowledge, one can pretend to "know" and understand the emotional experience of life.

Kramer suggests that feelings like homesickness or loneliness are mediated through neurotransmitters like serotonin, or possibly encoded in neurons, and the fact that Prozac eases

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these conditions seems to confirm this view. But the notion that matter and mood can have a direct connection with one another—that somewhere at the neuronal junction, loneliness and serotonin "meet"—is tantamount to saying that the human mood is material, and that it can be touched by matter. Buried within the biogenic amine theory is an illogical belief—that neurotransmitters are shedding their physical existence, becoming even smaller than atoms, and ultimately merging with pure thought or idea.

The error in the biogenic amine theory can be understood in a slightly different way. Augustine once said that the human heart has more moods and emotions than hairs on the head or stars in the sky. What he meant by this is that happiness has an infinite number of shades, reflecting the infinite that is the human soul, which mirrors the infinite that is God. Even if every particle of serotonin crossing the synaptic cleft of a nerve terminal could be measured, along with every particle of noradrenalin and dopamine, the number of particles would still be finite, while the moods of a human being would still be infinite. By definition, there are simply not enough particles to express every conceivable human mood.

## Creating virtual realities

But what about drugs like alcohol or narcotics? They alter our moods when ingested, producing feelings like euphoria and indifference. Is this not a case of matter affecting mood by way of a common border inside the brain?

No, it is not, and this is key to understanding how drugs like antidepressants really work. Alcohol and narcotics do not produce such feelings by being received directly into the "substance" of human emotions. On the contrary, they simply alter human consciousness in a way that allows the mind to shift its mood. These drugs work by dampening certain aspects of brain function—*they create an altered mental state*—such that true reality becomes concealed from a person's consciousness. The dampened brain functions allow a person to imagine an alternate "reality" that is generally more pleasing.

For example, when a man contrasts his humble circumstances with some ideal of success, tension arises in his psyche. His conscience berates him, and he feels the well-known mis-

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ery of failure. He might try some diversion, like golf or stamp-collecting, in order to hide from himself what he does not want to face, but sometimes the diversion does not sufficiently block the sight of things that he dislikes. So he starts to drink, and the alcohol alters his consciousness in such a way that he is diverted. After ingesting alcohol, the eye of his mind no longer sees the images that were causing him so much pain. At this point, the man starts to feel better, even "happier."

Drinking is a reliable method of dealing with unhappiness not because it exerts a direct effect on a person's mood but because it helps conceal from view what he does not want to see. It is by dampening or altering brain functions and by affecting consciousness that alcohol transforms how we feel.

It is the same with antidepressants. They are merely another form of stupefaction. True, people who take them because they are unhappy are not like alcoholics or drug addicts—they function at work, they are well mannered, and they do not vomit in the streets. But although their method is "cleaner," they are attempting the same thing as the person who uses alcohol to raise his spirits. Unlike the drunk, their minds remain awake, clear, and lucid, but the drugs have still tampered with their brain functions, hiding from them what they do not want to see.

This point was revealed to me in the case of one friend who was taking Prozac for general unhappiness, though not under my supervision. He said, "I feel a lot better. I don't have to look into the abyss anymore. I see my problems, but they don't seem as daunting as they once did." With the help of a psychoactive drug, he was able to retire further and further from his mind's sight those images that were painful to him. He still saw their visible outlines, but his new mood was based on an altered perception of their image. He was no longer menaced by them because they had grown distant to him.

The same phenomenon can account for what Kramer calls "cosmetic psychopharmacology." Kramer reports with amazement how one of his female patients, after taking Prozac, changed from a social misfit into an accomplished coquette, capable of maneuvering smoothly from one man to the next, even of securing three dates in a single weekend. But is this

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any different from what alcohol might do for someone with similar hesitations? Is this really a "new self" courtesy of Prozac? Of course not. A woman wants to flirt with men, but her self-doubt tells her not to do so. The result is tension and unhappiness. So she takes alcohol in order to silence the critic within and feel "liberated." This is nothing new.

## Prozac nation

Yet despite the rather obvious nature of antidepressants, medical science studiously avoids putting antidepressants in the same category as alcohol and narcotics. It struggles to preserve the deceit of a special mood-matter link at the level of the neuronal junctions. Why is this so? Why does it bother to support the irrational notion that mood and matter share a common interface? To the degree that it is a conspiracy, it is one enjoined by our entire culture: People desperately want to believe in such a link; they want to believe that the cause of happiness is located in the physical world, and that happiness somehow comes about scientifically in the form of a pill. The promise of such a view is security and comfort.

First, to admit one's dependence on psychoactive drugs is to shield oneself from life's imponderables and unpredictability. If happiness is serotonin, and serotonin is happiness, then these drugs guarantee happiness, for one can take psychoactive drugs for years. It is with this attitude that people with mild depression might substitute the chance of real happiness with some semblance of happiness achieved through medication.

Second, to declare happiness a law of necessity allows science to emphasize the subcellular processes inside the brain at the expense of everything else. Science can say: "It is man's basic nature to want happiness, but if the natural desire for happiness is linked to the physical nature of his brain, it cannot be linked to culture, which varies from society to society. The search for happiness begins and ends in nature, and so there is no reason to go beyond science." By believing this to be true, people can put aside other approaches to coping with daily troubles—which is convenient, since these remedies, whether they involve talking to a friend or asking for divine guidance, are never a sure thing.

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Third, the notion that happiness is a law of science appeals to human pride. If unhappiness is chemical or biological, along with its treatment, a person need not ask, "Why am I unhappy?" In the past, this question provoked serious introspection and self-examination, as the effort to cope with unhappiness merged with larger questions about life and existence. Religion and philosophy demanded that people see themselves as part of a larger whole and taught that happiness depended on more than self-satisfaction. But if happiness is a law of science, then one does not have to go through this humbling experience. Through drugs, one can find happiness as a single, isolated individual.

Fourth, and perhaps most crucial, depressed persons equate the pleasant mood evoked by psychoactive drugs with happiness, even though, in the depths of their hearts, they are not sure exactly what they feel. Still, people do not want to live a lie, and so they will accept their drug-induced "happiness" as the real thing only if they believe that science has truly uncovered the biology of happiness. And this is what the biogenic amine theory of matter and mood represents. It reassures people who take medication that their good feeling is indeed happiness.

For people suffering from clinical depression, the mental state produced by these drugs must be considered an improvement, and often, a necessary one. But for those people who suffer from unhappiness, perhaps because of stress or because they are in bad relationships, these drugs are nothing more than a shortcut to a particular mental state that they believe to be happiness but is not.

## Your mind on drugs

What exactly do people feel when they take antidepressants? It is difficult to say because each person expresses the feelings aroused by medications like Prozac differently. There is simply no universal feeling. Nevertheless, a broad understanding of the phenomenon is possible, and what emerges among medicated patients is a definite change in consciousness.

In most of the testimonies published, patients note that the good feeling arising from the influence of mood-modifying

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drugs does not come about immediately. It often takes several weeks, and this delayed effect is considered to be so predictable that doctors warn their patients about it. The slow onset of the drug causes the change in people's attitude to be barely perceptible. There is generally no minute or hour that marks the onset of their improved mood.

And so it is not surprising that after people start taking medication, life continues by virtue of its own momentum. If, before taking the drug, people biked for recreation or shopped because it was their favorite pastime, they generally do so afterward. Except in rare cases of "cosmetic psychopharmacology," described by Kramer, the tastes and interests of a person do not change; the person on medication remains the same person.

For this reason, however, it cannot be a change in life that causes the uplift in spirit, since for the people taking these drugs, life does not change. Generally, most people calculate their happiness by external circumstances. But psychotropic drugs enable people to feel better even though their external circumstances are unchanged. The cause and effect relationship that has dominated their lives is not working properly, and while they feel better, they are confused.

Patients on psychotropic drugs still react to specific external events in an appropriate manner. Their mood goes up or down according to what happens in their environment. But while these patients may smile at a party or laugh at another's jokes, I have often observed a general lack of congruence between outside circumstances and a medicated patient's good feeling, and this observation is commensurate with the amazement expressed by these people at feeling well despite the lack of change in their outside circumstances. The outside world becomes, in a way, detached from their inner life. Its influence decreases.

Casual conversation with hundreds of patients taking psychotropic medication serves as the basis for this opinion. One patient of mine who was asked on a pre-operative evaluation how medication helped him replied, "I see the same things as before, but I don't care so much. I still feel good no matter what happens." Another patient in the same situation said, "I don't know why. I just feel really good about myself." For such people, the relationship between their outer life and

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their inner life becomes like two wheels that once rotated in tandem, and continue to do so, but are now ever so slightly off, with barely different speeds, such that while they appear to be connected by an axle, it is impossible for them to be so.

People medicated for depression often talk about enjoying activities that they did not enjoy prior to starting medication. But again, there is something suspicious in their pleasure. For example, two friends of mine told me that they "felt better" on medication, which enabled them to play tennis and feel good again while doing so. Yet it was not so much that they extracted pleasure from playing tennis but, rather, brought the pleasure they enjoyed through medication into this activity. It was a pleasure that they experienced for no discernible reason, and it mildly confused them since, deep down, they were the type of people who felt good only when external circumstances were going their way. Yet nothing in their lives had changed but a pill.

It has been observed that people who are not depressed and who take psychoactive drugs sometimes feel uncomfortable. The above observation might explain this phenomenon. The mood of such people is altered by drugs, but in a way that they cannot understand. They become like the traveler in a boat who feels confused by the imperceptible changes beneath his feet, and worse, has no beacon on the horizon on which to fix his gaze. He cannot establish a connection between what he is feeling and what he is seeing, so he starts to feel queasy. Nothing in the outer world seems to move, and so he cannot ascribe his inner feeling to an outside event. And if he does find a beacon sitting on the horizon, he cannot readily admit to himself, "Yes, I feel this way because of what I see," since what he sees never produced a feeling like this before. The whole thing makes no sense, and so he starts to feel seasick.

## Know thy self

Psychoactive medication, much like alcohol and narcotics, causes a disconnect between the inner and outer life. This is the problem with using it to treat everyday unhappiness. The disconnect caused by medication is very different from the state of thoughtful detachment encouraged by many cultures for the purpose of insulating people from everyday disappoint-

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ment. The latter contributes to wisdom, stability, and maturity; the former creates a state of mind that is stuporous and purposely unknowing.

Medical science should confine itself to the treatment of clinical depression, rather than extend itself into the realm of everyday unhappiness. Medical science "helps" unhappy people by clouding their thoughts, by making them less aware of the world, and by sapping their urge to see themselves in a true light. People medicated for everyday unhappiness gain inner peace, but they do so through a real decrement in consciousness.

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# Who's a liberal?

WILLIAM A. GALSTON

IT is reported that after Thomas Babington Macaulay, the nineteenth-century British historian and statesman, delivered a typically emphatic speech in the House of Commons, one of his colleagues remarked to another, "By God, I wish I were as sure of *anything* as Macaulay is of *everything*." As I read Brian Barry's *Culture and Equality*,† that quotation rushed unbidden into my mind. Barry has delivered a thumping book, brimming with certitude, written in what Alan Wolfe has recently called a "take no prisoners" style. (In the interest of full disclosure, I should say that I am one of the combatants Barry chooses to shoot rather than incarcerate.)

Ever since the publication of his book *Political Argument* in 1965, Barry has been regarded as one of the most insightful political philosophers working in the Anglo-American tradition. His approach is broadly liberal, in both the philosophical and political senses of the term. In the tradition of philosophical liberalism, he seeks principles to which persons he regards as reasonable could give their willing assent. Along with other contemporary political liberals, he emphasizes equality, suitably understood, as the guiding value of decent politics. In his most recent books, *Theories of Justice* and *Justice as Impartiality*, he has offered both a critique of John Rawls's theory of liberal constitutional democracy and an alternative theory leading to similar conclusions about the role of the activist state in securing the conditions of fair equality. While he has changed his mind on some important matters during the past 30 years, he has never wavered in his belief that reason is capable of arriving at general principles of politics applicable to all human beings.

In his latest book, Barry is affronted by the challenge to universal principles posed by contemporary theories of group

† Harvard University Press. 416 pp. $35.00.



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rights, cultural nationalism, and special privileges and exemptions from generally valid laws. He views these theories, which he lumps together under the aegis of "multiculturalism," as a return to the errors of the nineteenth-century Romantic-irrationalist revolt against the Enlightenment, a stance that if put into practice could exacerbate ethno-cultural conflict and lead to the oppression of individuals. His purpose in *Culture and Equality* is to delegitimate multiculturalism, theoretical root and practical branch. His strategy takes the form, if not the content, of a nineteenth-century Catholic Syllabus of Errors, arraying and refuting all manner of what he regards as dangerous foolishness.

Along the way, Barry manages to say many things with which some conservatives are likely to agree. For example, he voices skepticism about the "disparate impact" analysis of employment discrimination, and he is a huge fan of Justice Scalia's majority opinion in the *Oregon v. Smith* case, which held that American Indians do not have a constitutional right to use peyote in their religious practice. But conservative readers should not be lulled into complacency. Barry's critique of multiculturalism is in the service of an egalitarian economic and social agenda far closer to the one I helped promote as a Clinton administration official than to anything conservatives could possibly stomach.

BARRY is admirably frank about the political frame of his philosophical and policy analysis. The practical effect of multiculturalism, he asserts, is to divert attention from real economic and social injustices and to weaken, if not altogether dissolve, what would otherwise be a united and purposeful coalition for redistributive egalitarian policies. This is a favorite theme of New York public intellectuals such as Todd Gitlin and Michael Tomasky, with whom Barry seems to have been consorting of late, and it represents an honorable effort to reassert the agenda of the Old Left over against excesses of identity politics. After much of the practical socialist agenda had been discarded in the famous dustbin of history, Irving Howe once remarked that "socialism is the name of our desire." The irresistible left-egalitarian coalition is the name of Barry's desire. Fair enough. But as a piece of serious political analysis, it is a fantasy.

How does Barry's thesis fail as political analysis? First, there has rarely been much of a market in the United States for redistributive programs. Even at the height of the New

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Deal, Franklin Roosevelt delivered rhetorical broadsides against the "dole" and sold Social Security as a contributory program, carefully downplaying its redistributive features. In the late unlamented 2000 presidential contest, Albert Gore's oft-repeated critique of George Bush's tax cut as regressively oriented toward the top 1 percent of taxpayers failed to capture many hearts or change many minds. In the United States, distribution tables—of taxes, income, wealth, or whatever—prove of little moral consequence on their own. Redistributive policies can be sold and sustained only when linked to publicly compelling moral premises ("If you work, you shouldn't be poor"). This feature of American political culture both annoys and baffles left-leaning Europeans, but it means that no special causal factor (whether multiculturalism or anything else) need be invoked to explain the weakness of redistributive egalitarianism in the United States. It's the occasional success that requires explanation.

SECOND, there is scant evidence that the weakness of the egalitarian coalition should be attributed to multiculturalism. The two great conservative electoral shifts of the past generation, in 1968 and 1980, occurred largely in response to traditional public problems—foreign policy, economic management, social order—rather than anything as recherché as identity politics. To be sure, racial conflict helped sunder the Democratic coalition. But the key flashpoints were political rights in the segregationist South and economic opportunity in the unionized North—hardly the core of the multiculturalist agenda.

Third, Barry regards the Clinton administration as an item in his bill of particulars—a high-water mark for official multiculturalism (the cabinet that "looks like America," the race commission, the hyperactive Office of Civil Rights in the Department of Education), coupled with abject surrender to the anti-egalitarian policies of the Reagan era. In this regard (not an isolated instance, unfortunately), Barry hasn't bothered to acquaint himself with some basic facts. Clinton's first budget socked the well-to-do with a large tax increase while transferring tens of billions of dollars to the working poor through a doubling of the Earned Income Tax Credit, from $15.5 billion in 1993 to nearly $31 billion in 1999. Clinton's macroeconomic policy pursued, and ultimately attained, rapid growth that led to the first full-employment economy in more than three decades. As any economist could have predicted, tight labor markets had their greatest proportionate effect at the

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rear of the labor queue, among low-wage workers and the previously unemployed. As a result, the last five years of the twentieth century were the first sustained period since the early 1970s in which earnings in all income quintiles rose by roughly equal percentages and in which the increase in income inequality was halted. During the Clinton years, not surprisingly, overall poverty declined from 15 percent to under 12 percent; child poverty rates declined from 22 percent to about 16 percent; and poverty rates among African-American children and the elderly fell to the lowest levels ever recorded. The argument that a commitment to multiculturalism necessarily undermines the coalition needed to sustain an egalitarian economic program doesn't survive cursory inspection.

HAVING cleared away the political underbrush, let me now turn to more serious issues of policy and philosophy, in that order. We encounter a difficulty at the threshold: In his drive to bring multiculturalists to justice, Barry rounds up a heterogenous group of suspects and charges them all with the same crime. He suggests that what he calls multiculturalism is of a piece and that internal differences are quantitative rather than qualitative—doses of different strength, as he puts it. But that is not the case. Many of the principles and policies Barry lumps together are distinguishable both in theory and in practice.

For example, I believe that a strong case can be made, on liberal grounds, for exempting members of religious groups from many (not all) laws that have the effect of restricting religious free exercise. Barry disagrees. I believe that absent compelling reasons to the contrary, principled liberals must defer to individuals' own sense of what gives life meaning and purpose, and ensure that the intrusion of state institutions on individual lives is restricted to securing the minimum conditions of civic unity and social justice. Barry views this as an unreasonable regard for diversity at the expense of other important values. But whatever the truth of these matters, a person who believes in religious exemptions, or in maximum feasible deference to individual understandings of the good life, is not thereby committed to endorsing Iris Marion Young's group-centered conception of political decision-making, or Will Kymlicka's linkage between culture and nationality, or Chandran Kukathas's defense of group immunity from the most basic liberal norms, all of which positions I reject for reasons not unlike Barry's. So let me engage him on the terrain I wish to

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defend; others will have to speak for themselves.

ONE view of religious exemptions, the one to which I am attracted, runs as follows: The free exercise of religion is one of the most basic rights human beings possess. (It would not be a huge exaggeration to suggest that freedom of religion is the grain of sand in the oyster of politics around which the pearl of liberalism gradually formed.) It is so fundamental, as James Madison argued in the "Memorial and Remonstrance," as to constitute a reservation against the authority of the state:

> It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator such homage and only such as he believes to be acceptable to Him.... Every man who becomes a member of any particular Civil Society, [must] do it with a saving of his allegiance to the Universal Sovereign. We maintain therefore that in matters of Religion, no mans right is abridged by the institution of Civil Society.

This is not to say that the government has no authority over religious free exercise. There are some basic interests that the state has a right, and sometimes a duty, to defend—if need be, with coercive power. No one seriously argues that religious free exercise extends to human sacrifice, even with the full and uncoerced consent of the virgin. If you want a slogan, "No free exercise for Aztecs." In order for state intervention in religious exercise to be legitimate, two conditions must be satisfied. First, the state interest must be urgent and important—in the language of American jurisprudence, "compelling." Second, the state must employ the least intrusive means needed to achieve its purpose; the remedy must be "narrowly tailored." Put otherwise (but still in the language of jurisprudence), there is a presumption in favor of the religious liberty of the individual, and the state bears a substantial burden of proof if it seeks to overcome this presumption.

In his controversial *Smith* opinion, Justice Scalia rejects this entire way of thinking. If a law is neutral on its face, of general application, and directed to matters within the state's competence, the mere fact that it has the effect of selectively burdening the free exercise of religion is neither here nor there. The state has no burden of proof to discharge. Quite the reverse: Any society adopting a presumption in favor of religious free exercise would be "courting anarchy." The greater the religious diversity within a polity, the greater the risk. So even fundamental rights must be subjected to the democratic political process. If that means that minority views are system-

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atically disadvantaged, tough luck: "That unavoidable consequence of democratic government must be preferred to a system in which each conscience is a law unto itself." It is this majoritarian Hobbism that Barry so vigorously applauds.

Barry seems to think that religiously based claims for exemption from general laws are urged on grounds of justice, that the faithful are unequally or disproportionately burdened. Not so. The argument is that the centrality of religion to conscience, and of conscience to personal integrity, generates claims of special significance. To subject these claims without further ado to ordinary majoritarian processes is to deny that religion is special. It is to deny that the exercise of religion is a right worthy of protection against government. Barry is free to affirm this if he wishes, but he is not free to suggest, as he does repeatedly, that those who take the Madisonian, rather than Hobbesian, view of individual conscience have forfeited their right to be considered liberals.

JUDGED from the standpoint of American law and jurisprudence, Barry goes to extraordinary lengths to curtail religious liberty. For example, he argues that "the educational authorities of a state can quite properly take the view that creationism is too intellectually corrupting to be taught in any school, whether public or private." And he expresses the hope that Scalia's *Smith* opinion, suitably enlarged in scope, may someday persuade a majority of the Court to grant states the right to exercise such authority. Fortunately, the current Court is wiser than that and seems as disinclined as its predecessors were to tamper with, let alone reverse, its decisions in *Meyer v. Nebraska*, which held that states could not forbid teaching in languages other than English, and *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, which held that states could not require children to attend public schools only. These decisions interpreted the liberties guaranteed in the Bill of Rights to rule out the powers Barry wants the states to exercise. The principle underlying Barry's position, the Court observes in *Pierce*, is contrary to the "fundamental theory of liberty upon which all governments in this Union repose." Barry's principle, says the *Meyer* Court, amounts to the theory of the plenipotentiary state asserting its authority based on superior rationality. It is, the Court concludes, nothing other than the theory of Plato's *Republic*, not usually understood as a liberal democratic text.

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I COME, finally, to the philosophical issue: What principles must one endorse in order to be a liberal, and what are the reasons for believing them to be true? In posing the question this way, I express my agreement with three fundamental points Barry urges: that liberalism asserts truths and is therefore incompatible with postmodernism; that the truths liberalism asserts are intended to be of universal, not merely local, application; and therefore that liberalism cannot be derived from, and is not compatible with, strong forms of moral or cultural relativism.

Here our agreement ends. In a 1995 article that Barry calls a "canonical statement" of the thesis he rejects, I argued that there are two quite different ways of thinking about liberalism, one with its roots in Enlightenment rationalism, the other in the post-Reformation struggle to deal with the political consequences of religious diversity. I suggested that while the Enlightenment approach, with its emphasis on the value and cultivation of rational autonomy, has many attractions (especially to secularized intellectuals), it tends to marginalize religious belief and constitutes an unlikely basis for a public order that endeavors to deal fairly with both believers and unbelievers. I offered an approach to liberalism that refuses to give pride of place to either side, acknowledges the fact of deep unresolvable differences (not just between belief and unbelief, but generally), and seeks a principled basis for respectful mutual coexistence. And I argued that this diversity-based approach is superior both in practice, by accommodating more ways of life of genuine value, and in theory, by reflecting more accurately the limits of reason to resolve disputes among ways of life.

Barry rejects my contention that liberalism as he understands it rests on an Enlightenment-based ideal of rational autonomy. He insists that while liberalism rightly understood has much in common with what many theorists mean by individual autonomy, liberalism neither embraces autonomy as an ideal nor establishes the promotion of autonomy as a right or duty of the state.

Despite the wedge Barry tries to drive between liberalism and a privileged position for rational autonomy, his preferred brand of liberalism continues tacitly to rely on the presumed superiority of secular rationalism. Space does not permit citing all the passages that support this conclusion, so let me offer one characteristic quotation as a teaser. After mocking the claims of a religious sect that makes ritual use of cannabis,

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Barry remarks that "it might perhaps be said of many other religious truths that they too would be more easy to believe in under the influence of mind-altering drugs."

In his earlier scholarship, Barry was more willing to acknowledge the existence of plural and conflicting (but nonetheless legitimate) goods, principles, and outlooks. Today, by contrast, Barry more closely resembles Ronald Dworkin in his confidence that sound principles plus strenuous reasoning are equal to the Herculean task of finding singular right answers to most of life's problems. For my part, I am increasingly inclined to believe that Isaiah Berlin had it about right: The distinction between good and evil is objective, but the good things of life are heterogeneous, are not neatly rank-ordered, and cannot be combined into a single harmonious package. To live well is to choose a good life, which inevitably means excluding other worthy possibilities. The philosophical justification for social pluralism is the diversity of legitimate human goods. This same diversity undergirds what I am not alone in regarding as the liberal stance toward life—namely, a generous receptivity to ways of life other than one's own, and a deep commitment to making the effort to understand why others come to embrace outlooks that one regards as peculiar, even repellant. It is this enlarged imaginative sympathy that characterized Berlin's work. Regrettably, it is conspicuous by its absence in Barry's book.

BARRY systematically exaggerates the gap between his position and mine, and it might well be said that I have responded in kind. So let me conclude on a more pacific note. Barry claims that liberalism rightly understood gives individuals universally valid claims against various forms of oppression. I agree. The real work is to make out the content of these claims: too narrow, and individuals are left exposed to unconscionable evils; too broad, and both states and groups are debarred from pursuing legitimate courses of action. Barry claims that liberalism rightly understood offers a robust endorsement of freedom of association. Again, I agree. Within broad limits, the state may not impose public norms on the internal life of groups, so long as membership in these groups is voluntary and the groups refrain from forbidden forms of coercion. One challenge is to determine when group practices constitute an affront to the basic public goods that the state is obliged to defend. And another is to define the conditions under which membership in a group should be construed as

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voluntary. Barry and I disagree about the definition of what counts as voluntary, and therefore about particular cases. It should be possible to adopt his position, or mine, without being drummed out of the fellowship of philosophical liberals in good standing.

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# The princes pay tribute

JERRY Z. MULLER

*EDUCATING the Prince,*† a new *Festschrift* in honor of Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., includes a list of his published work that attests to his prolific scholarship. But Mansfield has long had a reputation as an outstanding teacher as well. Thousands of Harvard undergraduates—among them, the presumptive princes of the book's title—have had their mental horizons expanded (and their GPAs contracted) by attending his courses. A much smaller number have worked with him on the doctoral level, and it is from these that the contributors are drawn.

The *Festschrift* is an inherently imperfect form. For it seeks to celebrate the honoree by reflection, by displaying his interests as mirrored in the work of his students—and mirrors may distort or dull or diffuse what they reflect. William Kristol, co-editor of the volume with Mark Blitz, acknowledges as much when he writes in his introduction that "I am confident I speak for all the contributors to this volume when I assert that these efforts of his students fall short of what Harvey Mansfield deserves." Some of the essays do indeed sparkle, and taken as a whole they remind us of the range of Mansfield's interests and achievements. Many of the best moments come when the contributors recall an insight from one of Mansfield's books, or an *aperçu* from his lips, such as, "Studying methodology is like practicing seduction on an empty couch."

Mansfield is a political theorist whose interests have linked contemporary concerns with the study of some of the great political thinkers of the past. The objects of his most sustained interest have been Edmund Burke and Machiavelli. His first book, *Statesmanship and Party Government: A Study of Burke and Bolingbroke*, published in 1965, included a well-founded critique of the image of Burke as a Christian natural law theorist (a conception then popular among conservatives), and

† Rowman & Littlefield. 326 pp. $40.00.



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stressed, by contrast, Burke's avoidance of first principles and his emphasis on prudence derived from historical experience. In this and other respects examined by Mansfield, such as his attention to political economy, Burke was an eminently modern thinker, a conservative rather than an orthodox one.

MANSFIELD, too, is a conservative. He supports the modern, liberal democratic regime, but he claims that liberal democrats frequently misunderstand the conditions that have made such regimes successful: above all, the limits placed on direct democracy by liberal constitutions in general and by the U.S. Constitution in particular. The egalitarianism of democratic rhetoric disguises and distorts the need for democracies to attract spirited leaders, Mansfield claims, and the liberal emphasis on law-abidingness disguises the allowances that successful constitutions make for extra-ordinary acts by elected leaders, a flexibility without which liberal democracies would not function. The very propensity to refer to leaders as "executives," who act with the authority of others, masks their leadership role.

Mansfield has explored these themes in a number of works, most notably in his 1989 book, *Taming the Prince: The Ambivalence of Modern Executive Power*. Like other students of Leo Strauss, Mansfield frequently reminds us that modern liberal institutions depend in part for their flourishing on practices that are neither modern nor liberal. (This is one of the recurrent themes of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, which Mansfield and his wife Delba Winthrop have recently translated.) Like other Straussians, Mansfield often plays with the distinction between the ancients and the moderns, but unlike some Straussians, he calls attention to the respects in which the moderns are superior to the ancients. He traces that superiority to Machiavelli, the founder of a political science of effective causes, rather than a high-minded theory of lofty but unattainable ideals. Not only has Mansfield produced important translations of Machiavelli's major works—*The Prince, The Discourses on Livy* (with Nathan Tarcov), and *The Florentine Histories* (with Laura Banfield)—but the inescapable relevance of Machiavelli is an important theme in many of his other works.

Mansfield regards the U.S. Constitution as a remarkably successful instrument, a success he attributes not to its purported congruence with Greek natural right or Christian natural law (in the manner, say, of Harry Jaffa), but to the success

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of modern, Machiavellian political science. "The typical mistake of the conservative," Leo Strauss once wrote, "consists in concealing the fact that the continuous and changing tradition which he cherishes so greatly would never have come into being through conservatism, or without discontinuities, revolutions, and sacrileges committed at the beginning of the cherished tradition and at least silently repeated in its course." Mansfield, in this respect and in many others, is an unorthodox conservative. At the beginning of the tradition to which Americans are heir, he asserts, stands the scandalous and sacrilegious Machiavelli (in whom he sees an adumbration of many themes often identified with Hobbes). Mansfield's method, often enough, is genealogical in Nietzsche's sense: It reveals a forgotten lineage, recalling the discontinuities, revolutions, and sacrileges that have gotten us to where we are—and the good reasons for them.

MANSFIELD, most of the time at least, is more bullish on modernity than Strauss was. That is apparent in their different views of Machiavelli, whom both see as the originator of modern political thought. Strauss claimed that

> There is no moral or political phenomenon that Machiavelli knew or for whose discovery he is famous that was not perfectly known to Xenophon, to say nothing of Plato or Aristotle. It is true that in Machiavelli everything appears in a new light, but this is due, not to an enlargement of the horizon, but to a narrowing of it. Many modern discoveries regarding man have this character.

Mansfield, by contrast, begins *Taming the Prince* with the claim that "modern political science is still most fully displayed, and to best advantage, if it is contrasted to the political science of the ancients."

It is a mark of his continued immersion in premodern thought that Mansfield frequently recurs to "the soul." But in contrast to the cultural pessimist's lament that modern life is flat and soulless, Mansfield maintains that much of what is rhetorically legitimated under the rubric of self-interest is akin to the sort of aristocratic spiritedness that the ancients prized and that doctrinaire egalitarians disdain. Indeed, that very spiritedness is both required by the liberal constitutional regime and facilitated by it. Liberal constitutionalism, he insists, leaves room for spiritedness and ambition in politics as well as in the private realms of the economy and of intellectual life. It tames princes without enervating them.

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The relationship of religion to the modern constitutional regime is another frequent concern in Mansfield's work. Liberalism owes its early modern origins to the recognition that religion is dangerous. Not only are religious differences a source of civil discord, but religious belief, when combined with power, leads to the "pious cruelty" that Machiavelli identified with the Inquisition and the expulsion of the Marranos from Spain. But as Mansfield reminds us, a slew of conservative (and not a few liberal) thinkers have regarded religion as necessary to keep most men moral and capable of that self-control without which limited government is impossible. So priests, too, must be tamed without becoming incapacitated.

THE contributions to *Educating the Prince* mirror Mansfield's interests but reflect the diverse orientations of his students. Many use some past thinker, politician, or debate to try to cast light on present dilemmas. They recur most frequently to the early modern era, from Machiavelli through Madison, on the assumption that it is there that many of the features and tensions of "modernity" (another favorite Straussian trope) are most readily identified. Conservatives sometimes seem schizophrenic, torn between an appreciation for what is and a nostalgic lament that things were once so much better. Mansfield's political thought leans in the former direction; some of his contemporary commentary in the latter. The contributions to this volume reflect both sentiments as they mirror this educator of princes.

The early modern elevation of effectiveness over classical or Christian high-mindedness is explored in a number of essays. Nathan Tarcov provides an explication of a seemingly obscure chapter of Machiavelli's *The Prince* to bring out its lesson of this-worldly self-reliance, which he sees as characteristic of modernity. Read carefully and with its historical allusions in mind, Tarcov shows, the chapter argues for the need for prudence, rather than a reliance on God, miracles, or even unbreakable rules. An essay by Jerry Weinberger on Francis Bacon explores a related theme. In a wonderful essay on Shakespeare's *Henry V*, Paul A. Cantor explores the ambiguities and ambivalences in the play that result from the tension between Roman and Christian ideals of manliness, between classical martial virtue and the Christian virtues of meekness and forbearance. Cantor shows how Shakespeare's Henry draws alternately on each set of virtues, while subordinating them all to his own instrumental purposes. At a time when the invoca-

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tion of "virtue" has become a shibboleth in conservative circles, it is good to be reminded of the incompatibility of the various conceptions of virtue in the traditions of the West. Mark Blitz's essay on "Virtue, Modern and Ancient," also demonstrates that different ages have their characteristic virtues, and that the traits of niceness, tolerance, industry, and responsibility so valued by modern society were not regarded as virtues by the Greeks. Blitz himself presents a culturally declinist interpretation of this difference: The modern virtues, he writes, are purely instrumental, discourage excellence, and betray a lack of belief in intrinsic, higher purpose. They are meant to satisfy "the flat desires of modern man."

Clifford Orwin, in a study of Rousseau's "Essay on Political Economy," explores another form of high-mindedness, the attempt to use the state to create virtuous citizens. The insoluble dilemma faced by Rousseau was that only virtuous politicians can create the laws and mores through which a virtuous citizenry could be formed, but that required a superhuman legislator, which Rousseau could only conjure. Susan Meld Shell explores a related theme in an essay on the unappreciated realism of Kant's political thought. Kant stressed the need for morally neutral governmental authority, she writes, precisely because he thought that politicians should not be confused with educators. Arthur Melzer uses a discussion of Rousseau to explain the puzzling historical affinity between a modern state based on self-interest yet legitimated by the novel phenomenon of nationalism. He claims that the pursuit of "self-interest," so central to modern political thought, leads to a fear of natural conflict over interests, which in turn requires a state to protect self-interested individuals from one another. The modern state, he holds, legitimates itself not by patriotism (it is too big for that) or by the discredited doctrine of the divine right of rulers, but by nationalism, the attenuated love for others "for no other reason than that they are similar."

THE tensions between modern political thought and religion are explored in a series of essays by John P. Gibbons on Marsilius of Padua, Peter Minowitz on Adam Smith's concern for taming religious fanaticism and faction, and Kenneth Weinstein on the seventeenth-century skeptic Peter Bayle, an important but too little known precursor of the Enlightenment. Weinstein shows that Bayle aimed to further Hobbes's project of diminishing the danger posed by religion to the

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state. Bayle questioned the plausibility of the claims about otherworldly reward and punishment that gave factious priests their hold over men's minds and allowed them to disrupt political stability. Bayle also questioned the empirical validity of the assumption that belief in the afterlife actually conduces to moral behavior. Since we cannot depend on religious belief to intimidate the conscience into good behavior, he concluded that we must rely instead on the law and the sense of honor. Essays by Ralph Hancock and Robert Kraynak explore some of these tensions and reach (or reach for) explicitly Christian resolutions.

Half a dozen essays investigate the theory and practice of the American political regime. Both David F. Epstein (author of perhaps the best book on the political theory of *The Federalist Papers*) and Charles R. Kesler explore the antidemocratic elements of *The Federalist Papers*. James R. Stoner, Jr.'s piece on the common law and the Declaration of Independence seems to exemplify "the typical mistakes of the conservative," as Strauss described them, ironing out the discontinuities of the past by portraying the unbroken thread linking the U.S. Constitution to the hoary tradition of the common law. It is to Stoner's credit, perhaps, that he seems only to half believe his own argument. Jeremy Rabkin casts a more ironic light on the Framers. The relative geographic isolation of the new United States, he writes, made it possible for some of the Founders to overlook that the enforcement of Lockean "natural rights" ultimately rested on the ability of the national government to defend its citizens and their territory from foreign incursion. The nation's disastrous lack of preparedness for the War of 1812 led Jefferson and Madison to recognize such necessities, which their republican theory had previously underplayed. R. Shep Melnick examines the ways in which the U.S. Constitution has shaped our policy-making institutions, especially the peculiarities of our public bureaucracy when viewed in comparative perspective. An essay by Jessica Korn examines the relationship between diverse private interests and the legislative outcome of the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

Several other contributors write about history in what Nietzsche called the monumental mode, which eschews irony and searches for models of greatness in the past. Such is the tone of Glen F. Thorow's portrait of Abraham Lincoln and James W. Muller's examination of Winston Churchill's *My Early Life*, which he accepts at face value as a reliable portrait of a faded aristocratic age.

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ALL in all, this volume of essays by Mansfield's students attests to the breadth of their teacher's interests and to the liberality that has led a rather diverse group of students to his door. One effect of reading the essays is to lead the reader back to Mansfield's own writings. For a *Festschrift*, that is the mark of success.

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# Virtue and poverty

PETER BERKOWITZ

UNTIL recently, for many intellectuals and policy experts, virtue was more than a suspect concept bound up with a bygone era and an outmoded worldview. Virtue, for them, signified a crude, blame-the-victim approach to reform, a code for the exercise by the Haves of social control over the Have-Nots, a hypocritical cover under which smug moral scolds and self-righteous religious enthusiasts diverted attention from the root causes of poverty in America, material deprivation and discrimination. To such critics, arguments from virtue demonstrated moral and intellectual vice.

Yet today, as Joel Schwartz observes in *Fighting Poverty with Virtue: Moral Reform and America's Urban Poor, 1825-2000*,† virtue has regained some of her loveliness. Schwartz, a program officer at the National Endowment for the Humanities, asserts that it is now widely accepted that public policy should promote diligence and familial responsibility, the only question being by what methods. In Schwartz's informed and thoughtful view, this represents great progress in the debate over welfare reform.

Adroitly combining historical scholarship, philosophical reflection, and policy analysis, Schwartz places current controversies about the relation between virtue and social justice in the context of the history of moral reform in the United States. He shows that the fight against poverty can be neither just nor effective unless it tends to the qualities of mind and character of those it seeks to help. But he also finds that while a successful fight against poverty must always include moral reform, that is never enough in an advanced industrial, even postindustrial, state.

Leading moral reformers in the nineteenth century displayed a complex understanding of poverty. They openly and

† Indiana University Press. 353 pp. $39.95.



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consistently articulated the view—principally thought of as conservative today—that poverty was to be overcome by teaching the poor how to help themselves. But Schwartz also shows that little-chronicled but influential activists such as the Reverend Joseph Tuckerman, Robert M. Hartley, Charles Loring Brace, and Shaw Lowell were under no illusions about the powerful social and economic forces that threw families and communities into a devastating tailspin. For this reason, the moral reformers felt no compulsion to choose between practices designed to inculcate virtues and those aimed at providing material support and enacting structural reforms. They created industrial schools, helped the poor find employment, promoted temperence, built savings institutions, and advocated women's education and self-reliance. They believed their efforts would instill diligence, thrift, sobriety, and familial responsibility. Though they tended to view these virtues as part of a larger religious understanding, the reformers argued for them on the grounds that they were essential to enabling the poor, just as they enabled the nonpoor, to succeed. At the same time, the reformers recognized that even the disciplined, able-bodied poor could not advance without basic material support, and therefore they also championed housing projects, the enactment of old-age pensions, and the unionization of labor.

THE good intentions and impressive coherence of the moral reformers' views, however, did not guarantee the success of their endeavors. Schwartz reports that their results were mixed, and discusses several reasons why. As comfortable and secure members of the elite, the reformers could not always avoid delivering their message in a haughty and patronizing manner that antagonized those whom it was supposed to inspire and instruct. The cultural and religious heterogeneity of the poor made it difficult for the moral reformers to craft a message to which all would be receptive. And the general intractability of adult behavior, its resistance to education and change, meant that moral reform would always be an arduous uphill battle.

Moreover, toward the end of the nineteenth century, as the ideology of laissez faire began to wane, the virtues that the moral reformers championed came under increasingly severe criticism. The poor were not poor because they lacked bourgeois virtue, a new generation of reformers argued, but because the economic structure and moral values of American society were flawed. Settlement-house leader Jane Addams criti-

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cized what she called the "industrial virtues"—diligence and thrift—and instead championed the "social virtues." She argued that rather than learn to be competitive and self-reliant, the poor should learn to cooperate and to depend on each other. Along similar lines, Walter Rauschenbusch, a leading figure in the Social Gospel movement (and maternal grandfather of Richard Rorty), attacked the moral reformers for inculcating selfishness and rational calculation. Like Addams, he offered an alternative understanding of virtue. What was needed, argued Rauschenbusch, was an ethic that placed selflessness and Christian charity at its center. Although Schwartz takes pains to point out the complexity of their positions, he concludes that by questioning the efficacy and indeed the morality of the individualist virtues, Addams and Rauschenbusch unwittingly conspired to de-moralize the fight against poverty.

THE moral revolution they set in motion reached its culmination in the 1960s and 1970s, when critics attacked not merely the particular virtues the moral reformers sought to teach but the very idea that teaching virtue was a valid response to poverty. Influential works such as William Ryan's *Blaming the Victim* and Francis Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward's *Regulating the Poor* placed responsibility for poverty exclusively on structural causes. To do otherwise, they argued, was an elitist attempt by the powerful to impose one-sided and parochial values on the powerless. As Schwartz indicates, such arguments carried the day at the very moment that real structural reforms involving the creation of the institutions of the welfare state made it more viable than ever for the poor to escape poverty by exercising the traditional virtues.

What accounts for the dramatic change in attitude from the nineteenth-century moral reformers to the reformers of the 1960s and 1970s, who rejected policies with any admixture of morality? In part, according to Schwartz, it was the experience of the Depression, which made vivid to many Americans the devastation that impersonal economic forces could wreak. But to explain why virtue was not merely demoted in the fight against poverty but eventually banished as an explanation and a remedy, it is necessary to take into account the spirit of the times. Invoking Daniel Bell's seminal exploration of capitalism's cultural contradictions, Schwartz observes that the comfort and luxury brought about by increased prosperity erodes the vir-

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tues on which prosperity ultimately depends. As Adam Smith noted in *The Wealth of Nations*, the moral looseness of the affluent elites, which they can afford, proves ruinous to the poor, whose lives leave little margin for error. One might add that the situation is even more serious than Schwartz acknowledges. For it is not only the affluence created by capitalism but also a democratic skepticism toward authority and the liberal devotion to autonomous individual choice that weaken the claims of virtue.

YET as Schwartz effectively documents, hopeful signs are on the rise in America today. Moral reform is more ecumenical and more democratic than ever, and the fight against poverty has developed what he calls a "liberal-conservative synthesis." Social scientists such as John DiIulio (recently appointed by President Bush to head the new White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives), Glenn C. Loury, Lawrence Mead, and James Q. Wilson have explored the empirical evidence that suggests the efficacy of inculcating virtues as an approach to fighting poverty. In his 1991 book *Liberal Purposes*, political theorist William Galston argued compellingly that liberal principles permit and at times even require government action in support of virtues necessary for the exercise of the basic requirements of citizenship. Black ministers such as former congressman Floyd Flake in New York City and Eugene Rivers in Boston have demonstrated the success of aggressive intervention by churches in the lives of young people in impoverished, crime-ridden neighborhoods. Governors across the nation have followed former Wisconsin governor Tommy Thompson's lead in finding ways, typically at increased cost to the state, to reduce welfare rolls by linking welfare to work—the approach embodied by the bipartisan welfare reform bill of 1996.

It is premature to draw any conclusions about the staying power of the new "liberal-conservative synthesis." Yet no reader of Schwartz's book can come away doubting that bourgeois virtue, vulnerable as it is to criticism, is good not only for the bourgeoisie but also for the poor. And it is now clear that any public policy, however well-intentioned, that neglects the part that virtue plays in improving the lives of the poor will fail.

In his conclusion, Schwartz writes that "if we want to encourage diligence, sobriety, thrift, and familial responsibility among the poor (as we should and must), it would be no small

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thing for us to act as if we believed in those virtues by practicing them ourselves." And if we want to encourage scholarship that can serve the public interest, it would be no small thing to act as if we believed in the virtues of intellectual inquiry. We may start by conducting our studies, as Schwartz has conducted his, with respect for facts, rigor in argument, a keen eye for partial truths, and a refined appreciation of the larger questions.

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# A successful civil war

LEE BOCKHORN

VISIT a large chain bookstore in almost any American city, and you will find half the shelves in the U.S. History section (sometimes more) groaning under the weight of books about the American Civil War—row upon row of volumes by Bruce Catton, Shelby Foote, James McPherson, and many other distinguished authors. Given this surfeit of offerings, do we really need any more Civil War books? Actually, yes, as Jay Winik amply demonstrates in his thought-provoking book, *April 1865: The Month That Saved America*.†

As I read this book, I thought of "The American Revolution as a Successful Revolution," an essay Irving Kristol wrote 25 years ago on the occasion of America's bicentennial. Unlike other modern revolutions (the French and Russian, especially), he noted, the American Revolution did not devour its own children; it did not aim to end poverty or establish an earthly utopia, and thus did not end with the inevitable bitter recriminations about "the revolution betrayed." Instead, it established a republic based on the rule of law and limited constitutional government; even more astonishing, the leaders that created this new political order went on to serve in its highest offices and die peacefully in their own beds (Alexander Hamilton excepted). In a certain sense, Kristol claimed, the Revolution was too successful for our own good, because we are now ignorant of just how difficult, even improbable, the Founders' accomplishment was, and of how much the perpetuation of their creation still depends upon our efforts.

In the spirit of Kristol's essay, one might title Winik's book *The American Civil War as a Successful Civil War*, because our Civil War was also a historical exception. As a former foreign policy adviser, Winik has witnessed first-hand civil wars in Cambodia, the former Yugoslavia, Nicaragua, and El

† HarperCollins. 496 pp. $32.50.



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Salvador: "Far too many civil wars," he notes, "end quite badly, and beget a vicious circle of more civil war and more violence, death, and instability." Thus the American Civil War's successful outcome—the nation reunited, the scourge of slavery ended—blinds us to the very real possibility that the Confederacy might have triumphed, or at the least, prolonged the conflict long enough to prevent the North from achieving total victory or emancipation. For some reason, we escaped this fate, emerging from our own civil war as a stronger, more unified country. By offering a new, fuller account of how the war ended, Winik attempts in *April 1865* to show why America was so fortunate. In so doing, he offers a much-needed meditation on the role of contingency in history and the importance of statesmanship, but along the way he overlooks how the success of the American Revolution made the unique result of our Civil War possible.

THE first task of any historian, of course, is to get the facts right: who, what, when, where, how. But the superior historian goes beyond this, forcing us to see afresh the events and persons we thought we already knew. One way to do this is to remind us of the role of chance in human affairs—to show how easily things might have been different.

Most of us, dimly remembering our grade-school textbooks, believe the Civil War ended neatly on April 9, 1865, when Robert E. Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia to Ulysses Grant at Appomattox Courthouse. And with nearly a century and a half of hindsight, we see the North's victory as inevitable, given the North's enormous advantage in industrial capacity (crucial in what was the first truly modern war), and the greater justice of its cause. But as Winik demonstrates convincingly, the successful end of the American Civil War was neither simple nor inevitable: "What emerges from the panorama of April 1865 is that the whole of our national history could have been altered but for a few decisions, a quirk of fate, a sudden shift in luck."

One such key decision was the South's rejection in April 1865 of the guerrilla warfare option. In this scenario, favored by Jefferson Davis, the Confederate army would break up into small groups, taking refuge in the forests and hills of the South to launch surprise attacks against massed Union forces in large cities. As an adjunct strategy, the South had already allowed "bushwacking" by several groups, led by notorious raiders like John Mosby. In a concise overview of the history

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of such warfare, Winik explains how the South could have demoralized the occupying Union armies by fighting a low-level war of attrition, until an exhausted North lost the will to impose unity on the country.

Chance also played a role in the dynamic events of April. One such "quirk of fate" is the bureaucratic mix-up that hastened Lee's eventual defeat. After the fall of Richmond, Lee headed west toward Amelia, where his sleep-deprived and starving army was supposed to find boxcars full of food. But when they finally arrived at Amelia, they found boxcars filled not with food but with 200 crates of ammunition. In the North, as Winik reminds us, Abraham Lincoln's assassination was part of a larger plot to assassinate the entire leadership of the Northern government, including Vice President Andrew Johnson and Secretary of State William Seward. But Johnson's designated assassin, George Atzerodt, got cold feet and spent the evening getting drunk, while Seward survived a brutal stabbing attack. What chaos might have ensued if John Wilkes Booth had succeeded in his plot to decapitate the Union government?

Indeed, Andrew Johnson's succession to the presidency was problematic enough, for in those days the process was not so clearly defined as it is today—and this was the first time the presidency had ever been transferred in the midst of crisis. (The implied intention of the Founders was that in the case of the president's death, the vice president would become the acting president temporarily, until a special presidential election could be held.) Johnson had met with Lincoln only once since the inauguration, and was detested as a drunk buffoon by Lincoln's cabinet. It is remarkable, then, as Winik tells us, that after Lincoln's death there was no talk of a regency or temporary cabinet government, as tempting as that might have been. In less than three hours, Johnson had become the new president.

CLEARLY, as Winik shows, the Civil War's close was not a tidy matter. As he attempts to explain why the war nevertheless ended so well, two heroes emerge—Lincoln and Lee. In his perceptive portraits of these men, Winik gives us a primer on statesmanship: on how the farsighted decisions of noble individuals can save a nation.

Surrender was not easy for Lee to accept; not long before Appomattox, he had told his troops they must all be "prepared to die at [their] posts" rather than surrender. But at Appomattox, seeing that his army was trapped and that guerrilla warfare was the only way to continue the war, Lee told his subordi-

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nates that they must "consider its effect on the country as a whole." "The only dignified course for me would be to go to General Grant and surrender myself and take the consequences of my acts"—knowing that those consequences might include imprisonment or death.

In late April, with the North outraged over Lincoln's death, sporadic fighting still continuing, and Jefferson Davis urging further resistance, the South still hung on Lee's every word, waiting for a further sign of what to do. It was then, Winik claims, that Lee, though no politician, demonstrated remarkable political shrewdness. In an interview with a reporter from the *New York Herald*, Lee condemned the assassination of Lincoln as "deplorable" and "beyond execration"; spoke throughout as a "citizen of the United States"; and said that the South was "anxious to get back into the Union and to peace." Then, seeking to dissuade General Joe Johnston and other leaders of the still extant Confederate forces from fighting on, Lee penned a final letter to Jefferson Davis, knowing that its contents would seep out to the rest of the South. He urged Davis to reject guerrilla warfare and seek the restoration of peace. Lee's efforts paid off, as Johnston and the rest of the Confederate leaders surrendered in the same honorable fashion as Lee.

While the South followed the statesmanlike example of Lee, the North followed Lincoln. Though Winik's book is titled *April 1865*, of necessity he begins his narrative with Lincoln's inauguration in March. In the inaugural address Lincoln gave that day, he memorably asked his countrymen to strive to "bind up the nation's wounds"; later that month, in his final meeting with his generals at City Point, Lincoln admonished them to offer the South generous terms of surrender when the time came, and to "treat them liberally all around. We want those people to return to their allegiance to the Union and submit to the laws." Thus Lincoln set the tone of honorable reconciliation that Grant and Sherman would follow in their treatment of Lee and Johnston, as exemplified by what Winik calls Grant's "astonishingly conciliatory" gesture—small, but immensely important—of allowing the defeated Lee to choose the time and place of his surrender.

WINIK'S central contention is that the Civil War and its remarkable end were the catalysts that transformed the United States from a loose confederation of states, divided by intense regional differences, into a unified nation; thus April 1865 is "the month that saved America," and deserves a place

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alongside 1492 and 1776 as pivotal dates in American history. He lays out his historical argument in meticulous fashion: There was a long American tradition of secessionist impulses, emanating from all regions, that ended with the North's victory; before the war, common usage referred to the United States as a plural—"the United States are"—whereas after the war, it became a singular—"the United States is"; the word "nation," Winik notes, was dropped from the Declaration of Independence, and the words "nation" or "national" appear nowhere in the Constitution. Indeed, during the war, the South came to possess a much stronger sense of national identity among its people than the United States as a whole had ever enjoyed.

Although this historical picture is accurately drawn by Winik, in some sense it fails to do justice to the achievements of the Revolutionary generation. The country the Founders had created was "made, almost abstractly, out of ink and paper, crafted by lawyers and statesmen," Winik writes. As a consequence, America "would not be able to escape ... the price of hate and blood in the making of nations," and this price was "paid in the Civil War." This is partially correct: Lincoln gave this assertion a religious dimension in his Second Inaugural, when he characterized slavery as an "offence" and said that God had given "both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence came." The Civil War thus became the blood price for the nation's version of original sin—slavery's denial of America's founding principles.

But if America was not really a "nation" before the war, and had been further divided by four years of awful bloodshed, what motivated Lee and Lincoln and their countrymen to end the war in the manner that they did, and thus save what the Founders created? Perhaps this abstract creation—a "constitutional roof" erected without "national walls," in historian John Murrin's characterization, which Winik cites—had, in fact, deep roots in the American experience. Throughout our history, stretching back to the arrival of the first settlers on the North American continent, Americans have seen themselves as a chosen people; as John Winthrop's shining "city upon a hill." As such, they were charged with a unique responsibility, to be carried out, as the Founders stated in the Declaration of Independence, "with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence." Americans once viewed their country as the agent of nothing less than a divine mission: to demonstrate to the world that self-government could long endure. As Hamilton famously put it in *Federalist* 1:

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> It has been frequently remarked, that it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, to decide by their conduct and example, whether societies of men are really capable or not, of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend, for their political constitutions, on accident and force ... a wrong election of the part we shall act, may, in this view, deserve to be considered as the general misfortune of mankind.

The destinies of both Lee and Lincoln were inextricably linked to the success of this mission. "By birth and inheritance," Winik notes, Lee "was tied to the Union, to its creation and its preservation." Two of his ancestors, Richard Henry and Francis Lightfoot Lee, had signed the Declaration of Independence; his father, Lighthorse Harry Lee, was a celebrated Revolutionary War general; by marriage, Lee was even related to Washington himself. And Lincoln, we must remember, revered what the Founders had done: Part of his life's work was to make reverence for the laws, including the Declaration and Constitution, "the *political religion* of the nation."

As Lincoln took office in 1861 with the storm-clouds of war approaching, it seems he anticipated the dilemma that would face the leaders of both the North and South in April 1865, and how that dilemma would be overcome. Recall the closing words of his First Inaugural:

> We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearth-stone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

Lincoln could foresee that even after bitter years of war, the "bonds of affection" these men shared as Americans would lead the "better angels" of their natures to choose magnanimity over vengeance, honorable peace over continued bloodshed. But these bonds of affection, these mystic chords of memory, were not created by Lincoln or Lee; they were forged by the devotion and sacrifices of the Founding generation—those who were now resting in "patriot graves"—and by the principles they fought to establish. So perhaps it is precisely *because* America had a successful revolution that it had a successful civil war.

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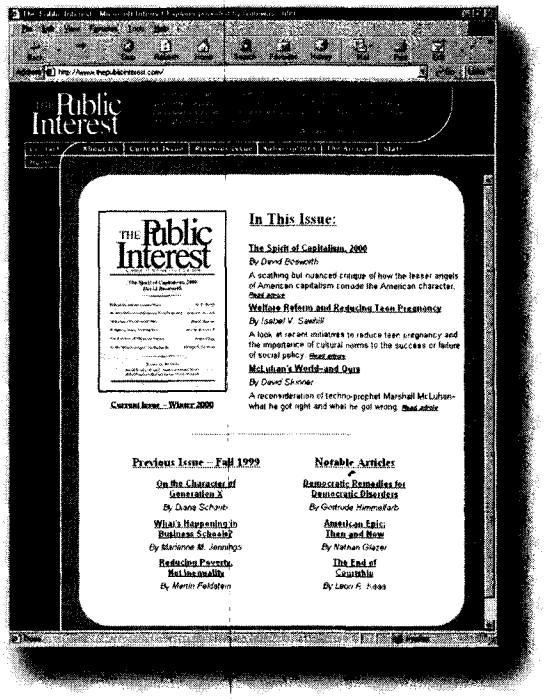


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CORRECTION: In our last issue (Spring 2001), the publisher of *The Burden of Bad Ideas* by Heather Mac Donald should have been listed as Ivan R. Dee.



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